

HELEN ORMESBY



BELLE MOSES



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HELEN ORMESBY



“‘Why can’t we cut off expenses and stay where we are?’”

[Page 12.]

HELEN ORMESBY

BY

BELLE MOSES

AUTHOR OF "LOUISA M. ALCOTT," "CHARLES DICKENS,"
AND "LEWIS CARROLL"



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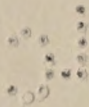
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"Let the maiden, with erect soul, walk serenely on her way, accept the hint of each new experience, search in turn all the objects that solicit her eye, that she may learn the power and the charm of her new-born being, which is the kindling of a new dawn in the recesses of space."

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

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CHAPTER I

HELEN, HELEN! We shall be late!" called a chorus of voices from the broad stone steps of the College. The 'bus had rattled up to the door, and half-a-dozen girls, in their gay-colored summer plumage, stood poised for flight, but still no Helen.

"She's gone back to weep over a forgotten piece of furniture," said Edith Carlyle. "She kissed everything in her room last night, even to the rugs on the floor, like a 'Sentimental Tommy.' It's beautiful to have that spirit about one's *Alma Mater*, but it doesn't belong to this world."

"Much you know about this world!" retorted Sylvia Browne. "Any one who dares to write a Commencement Ode and get a prize for it, is certainly not a worldling. But I wish she *would* hurry, I'd like to be off and away, I dread and despise prolonged partings; they destroy the taste of these delightful days. Oh, how good it is to feel that at last we're educated!"

"Young ladies, our education is never completed," drawled Josephine Ashton, in such a perfect imitation of Professor Felton's voice and manner, that that gentleman, standing among the Faculty group just inside the spacious hall, turned away to hide his laughter.

"Here she comes!" cried the Barton twins together

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—they always trotted in harness—" she's stopping in the hall to paw the Faculty."

"Oh, she's doing the whole show, paws for the men and pecks for the women, no wonder Helen was popular. I wish I had that gift of being agreeable without any effort," sighed Sylvia.

"My dear, social lights are born, not made, you might put Helen in a barrel, and she'd pop out again with her own little genial bow, perfectly well-bred, and with just the right word to say; but nevertheless, I'm going to haul her out by the hair, or we shall certainly miss our train," and Ruth Edgerton stalked grimly back into the hall.

She was just in time; the Faculty had positively closed in about Helen; there were audible sniffs among the women folk, while the men hid their emotion behind a somewhat overdone geniality. When Helen emerged at last, there were suspicious tears in her brown eyes, and her hat looked rakish.

"You're a sight, my love," said Ruth consolingly. "Just twist yourself into shape, for we haven't a moment to lose if we're to catch the 3.25 to New York. Come along, girls, we've scarcely time to check our trunks."

Helen laughingly settled her hat at the right angle, smoothed back a few unruly strands of her bronze hair, and joined the others in the 'bus.

"Let us give the yell as we go off," she said, and the staid old horses, startled by the unwonted sound, quite lost their heads, and ran like a pair of colts.

The Faculty was used to these demonstrations; each summer a bevy of graduates made their exit in just this way, and were remembered only as pleasant or unpleasant incidents connected with the College; but Helen

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Ormesby's going meant a big streak of sunshine out of their lives.

Old Joe, the rheumatic driver, cracked his whip many times during the ride to the station, probably in his hardened bosom regrets were faintly stirring. He was not given to emotion, but many a plug of tobacco had Helen Ormesby brought him from New York when she returned from her vacations, and even now she was getting up a subscription for his benefit among her companions in the 'bus.

"We must give the dear old growler something for good luck," she said, and generously began with a five dollar bill.

"Dear me! I can't keep up with that," declared Ruth. "Two dollars is my limit, unless I beg or borrow on my way home, and I don't like to begin life that way. How you ever keep your money with that lavish streak in you, Helen, I can't understand."

"I don't," said Helen affably. "Father gives me what I need, and when that is gone, I ask for more—it's very simple."

"Yes, it has all the simplicity of the square root," remarked Edith Carlyle, passing on her bill to the general pile, and by the time the station was reached and old Joe had limped around to help the girls with their suit-cases, Helen was able to thrust a nice little roll of bills into his knotted hand.

He sputtered out his thanks as he touched his cap, for Joe was a man of the fewest possible words, and he looked devoutly grateful when the train, rushing in at this moment, stopped all further demonstration.

A sudden sadness fell upon the seven girls as they watched the little station receding from their view. They had come and gone many times in the years of College

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life, but there was a finality about this going; all the hopes and aspirations which had found safe shelter in the fastness of those ivy-clad walls were now to be sent forth into the world, a very alluring world no doubt, for not one among the seven had a care for the future.

The Barton twins were going South, to be belles in their native town. They were pretty, dark-haired, velvet-eyed little girls, as like as two peas in a pod. Only the initiated could tell Alice from Elsie, some little trick of expression or gesture being the only distinguishing marks.

Edith Carlyle, with her blue eyes and angelic face, surrounded by an aureole of golden hair, had serious thoughts of being a trained nurse—perhaps the little witch knew how becoming a nurse's uniform would be to her. At any rate, she could already give first aid to the injured, and had a great many practical ideas on the subject. She lived a little way out of New York, on a beautiful estate overlooking the Hudson, and held many serious views about things, which were also very becoming.

Sylvia Browne had no further ambition than just to live in New York, with plenty of money and pretty clothes, and lots of fun. She was a veritable butterfly, full of bright, vivacious chatter, quick at learning, but with no thought or care for anything more serious. She was the youngest of the family, and all spoiled and petted this lovable child, from old Ben, the butler, who had known her from babyhood, to the stately and unapproachable cook below stairs.

Ruth Edgerton wrote; she wore glasses on her small nose, and aimed at high things. Her novel of purpose should startle the world. The Edgertons owned a ranch in the far West, spending six months in the big city and

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six on the great plains; there would be ample opportunity to study life in its many phases.

Josephine Ashton came of a musical family. The Ashtons lived in Philadelphia, in a stately old-fashioned mansion, in a stately old-fashioned style; music was the key-note of their lives. An older sister played the piano like a professional; her brother was a 'cellist of no small merit, and Josephine's ambition centered round her violin. The tall, dark, dreamy-looking girl had music in her soul, and having, besides, every advantage that money could give her, her violin became a living thing in her hands.

It was during a visit to the Ashtons, one memorable Thanksgiving, that Helen Ormesby discovered *her* ambition, at least the Ashtons discovered that she had a powerful contralto voice, and urged her so earnestly to begin its training, that the last two years at College saw her well on the way. Her great desire was to go abroad for a year's study before coming out; but she was keeping this wish well in the background, she knew how her mother and father had missed her since Hugh went to sea, and how empty the big Fifth Avenue house would seem if she, too, spread her wings. She was thinking of this now in the silence which had fallen upon them all, but Sylvia Browne could not preserve silence for very long.

"Has any one ever thought of the future?" she asked, in her most inconsequent tone. "Where we shall be for instance, five years from now?"

"Married I dare say, that's what we all come to," said Alice Barton, with an air of authority. "Elsie and I will probably dance a few seasons at home, not more than two, or we'll be dubbed old maids. Then we'll probably have a love-affair."

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"Only one?" asked Edith Carlyle.

"Don't be silly, I meant apiece; or we might get mixed up—we often do, you know."

"Wait a minute, girls, I'm going to turn prophet," cried Ruth Edgerton. "Five years hence, we seven will be speeding back to our *Alma Mater* for an Alumnæ reunion, is that agreed?"

"Yes, yes!" they cried, while people all about them smiled at their enthusiasm, "from the farthest ends of the earth."

"Alice and Elsie will bring the children, dear little dumplings, with their Southern 'Mammies.' Edith having captured the house-surgeon of the great hospital where she's going to serve humanity, will bring him along. Josephine will possibly be in foreign lands—it depends on Naval orders," said Ruth, slyly, while Josephine turned crimson as the laugh went around, and Helen tried to look unconscious, for her sailor brother's liking for the young violinist could not escape notice.

"Sylvia won't be married, she's quite too giddy to settle down, and every one will say: 'Dear me, that girl hasn't changed a mite, she's remarkably well preserved, I wonder what she does to her hair.'" Again there was a ripple of laughter, for Sylvia's hair was all shades and glints of golden brown.

"Your humble servant, in five years' time, will bear her first book on a silver salver to present to the College library; I'll have a professional squint, and know all things of all men. As for Helen—there are so many things that could happen to a girl like Helen. She'll go abroad, and develop such a glorious voice that people will flock beneath her windows to hear her sing her scales."

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Sylvia shook her head. "I wouldn't voluntarily listen to an angel singing scales—what next?"

"She'll be followed home by a string of the nobility, but she will have none of them, she'll rush out to the reunion because she's so fond of—of the Faculty."

There was a perfect shriek of laughter after this sally, Helen joining with the others, but behind all the fun something lurked in the depths of the brown eyes, only for a moment however, for no gravity could linger among that merry group.

There was to be a week in New York before the "We are Seven Club" separated for the summer. This chosen coterie had elected to remain behind a few days after the Commencement exercises, so the proud mammas and papas had journeyed back to the City, while the "Seven," as guests of the Faculty, had enjoyed the unwonted freedom, beneath the stately roof of the College.

"To think of any one reducing Mathematics to its lowest terms, and walking arm in arm with a Latin dictionary! It sounds like a fable," said Sylvia. "The Faculty was real human, with the dry-as-dust rubbed off—and didn't we have fun!"

The train was drawing into the great station and the girls were in a little flutter, straightening their hats, pulling on their gloves, and collecting their traps. They were to meet the next day, and the next, and the next, but this was the real parting of the ways—and each one felt it, though no one said it. In the throng of people pressing round the gates, they each managed to pick up some kind of a relative, and Helen, with a glad little cry flew to her father, whose tall figure, with its crop of silver hair, stood a head at least above the crowd.

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"Oh, Daddy, why didn't you come to the end!" she exclaimed, flinging her arms about his neck, regardless of spectators.

"Well, I just couldn't, dear; business, business you know—of the worst sort. I had to be on the spot, you see, that was the trouble; my earthly form was at my dusty old desk, my soul was soaring to your heights at the College. It was too bad. There's John, give him your satchel, Jerry is waiting outside with the Victoria. I told your mother I'd stop for you on my way up town."

The "Seven" made quite a showing as they stood together for a moment in the vast waiting-room. The twins each had an arm of their mother; Edith Carlyle was clinging to a handsome gentleman, who was certainly her father; Mr. and Mrs. Ashton had appropriated Josephine; Ruth Edgerton was with a little lady, unmistakably her mother, and Sylvia Browne was chatting volubly with a couple of big brothers.

"Well, *au revoir*, girls," called Helen. "I'll see you all to-morrow, this isn't the end of our jolly little club, I hope. Come, Father, if you only knew how I ached for the dear, lovely house, and a sight of Mother, in her pretty evening gown, and all the lights and flowers—I'll wear my prettiest to-night, even though it is June, some one will be sure to drop in. Now here we are; how do you do, Jerry?" she nodded gayly to their old coachman, who grinned as he touched his hat; then she flitted into the cushioned seat of the well-appointed Victoria, and her quick eye watched her father as he paused to give Jerry his orders.

Something was amiss—was it imagination—or did the broad shoulders stoop a little? There was a tired look in the eyes, too, quite unusual she assured herself,

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yet as he took his seat beside her, the shadow, if indeed it *was* a shadow, seemed to pass. He was as eager to hear all the College news as she was to tell it, and by the time the carriage had stopped before the beautiful gray stone mansion, he had been laughing like a schoolboy over some of the girls' escapades.

As Helen put her foot upon the steps, she became transfixed with amazement, for looking down into the spacious area, a sign "For Rent" stood on a pedestal, in the most conspicuous position.

"What—what is the meaning of that?" she demanded, pointing to it with an eloquent finger.

He tried to answer lightly, but his face had grown pale and his eyes were troubled.

"Thereby hangs a tale," he said. "You shall hear all about it later. I had meant to tell John to move that sign, I did not want it to spoil your home-coming. We are not dead or dying, it's only a sign after all. Cheer up, little girl, we are not going to talk about it until after dinner, when we'll hold a consultation; I really want to ask your advice about things; a College graduate should at least be able to give that *gratis*."

Helen's brown eyes met her father's gray ones with a defiant flash.

"She can give more. Dear me! I should never have left you two children alone, you need taking care of badly—it's time I came home. What's up, Daddy, money tight?"

"Very—a perfect squeeze."

"And you let me spend such a lot."

"A mere drop in the bucket, child. There are big sums involved." He put his key in the lock. "Now don't let your mother see that you know anything. Poor dear! she's been worrying over it all day." Then the

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oaken door, swinging wide, let Helen into her beautiful home.

It was such a home as only great wealth could provide. There was an immense *foyer* with soft, priceless rugs scattered over the inlaid floors, and a majestic, sweeping staircase leading to the next story. There were soft lights from stained-glass windows, and one or two open doors revealed the luxury of living. From one of these a lady came hurrying out, a beautiful lady, from whom Helen had borrowed her bronze hair.

"My dearest little Mummie!" cried the tall girl, swooping down upon her. "Aren't you glad to get your baby home, and isn't she glad to get here? Oh, how good everything looks, I can't think how I was ever willing to go away at all. I'm never going to budge again. Am I very late, have you put back dinner on my account? Never mind, if my trunk is here, I won't keep you waiting. I sent it by express a day ahead, you know."

"Phyllis is unpacking it in your room, I believe."

"Then we'll go up together," said Helen, passing an arm around her mother's slim waist, and beaming down upon her from her superior height.

The dying sun had filled the large room with a touch of rose; the filmy curtains swayed gently in the summer breeze, and there was the breath of flowers everywhere.

"Always flowers! That's like you, Mother, you never forget them. And how lovely my room looks." Indeed, it was beautiful, with its creamy furniture and its rose-colored hangings, just the sort of room a dainty girl might fancy.

Helen's maid looked up with eager delight; she had missed her young mistress, for Mrs. Ormesby had insisted on simplicity in the College life, and now she was

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handling Helen's clothes with as much tenderness as if they were flesh and blood.

It was very easy to lean back in the lap of luxury. With a contented sigh Helen handed herself over to Phyllis, and nestled in her favorite big chair while the deft maid took off her heavy boots and substituted dainty slippers, let down the rich hair and shook it out of its glossy tangle, and finally brought from the trunk a pink gown.

In this, at length, Miss Helen stood arrayed, and the long mirror gave back a pleasing reflection of a tall, slim young figure, with a wealth of tawny hair, coiled low on her neck, beautiful brown eyes, and a radiant color. Helen's features, though not altogether regular, were full of intelligence and animation, which stamped her at once as an extremely pretty girl. Her mother beamed approval, she had done little else but beam, for Helen's tongue had flown as fast as Phyllis's fingers. The girl had resolutely banished from her mind that ominous sign "For Rent," and lived only in the luxurious and delightful present. After dinner would come the deluge, of course, until then— So she floated downstairs to the gorgeous dining-room, and her now sharpened eyes detected nothing amiss. Everything moved with precision in this well-ordered household, and Mrs. Ormesby at the head, was the quiet power behind it all. Helen had been so accustomed to this elegance, that until to-night, when she knew grim care was sharing the feast, she had taken things very much for granted.

They went into the library where coffee was served, a room that breathed of books and art. There was not a picture on the wall that did not have a history; nor a quaint chair, nor a bit of tapestry. Over the high carved

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mantelpiece hung a Van Dyck portrait of Sir Hugh Ormesby, their Cavalier ancestor, while on the opposite side of the wall hung a companion portrait of his Puritan wife, Dame Prudence.

Helen sipped her coffee thoughtfully, then she set down her cup and perched herself on the arm of her father's chair.

"Now, Daddy, I insist upon knowing why we are 'For Rent.' "

"Will!" exclaimed Mrs. Ormesby, "I told you not to tell her."

"I didn't, my dear. I simply forgot to have the sign removed, and Helen, not being blind—"

"Which doesn't explain matters to me," interrupted Helen. "What has happened—or is going to happen?"

"Here it is in a nutshell," said her father in his direct way. "I'm at the head of a big deal involving millions, but just at present—unless substantial loans boost us up—we are in danger of foundering. If we can be propped for a year, we can stand alone; if not, we smash everybody and everything that comes in our way; we stand, so to speak, between Scylla and Charybdis, and unless something happens quickly we shall be crushed in either case."

"I see," said Helen gravely, "and Mother has offered you some of her own private fortune."

"Sage child! She's offered it all, that's the trouble; if I take it, I may save the day, but we should have to draw in for a year at least, and so—"

"We're 'For Rent,'" concluded Helen. "But why can't we cut off expenses and stay where we are?"

"My dear girl!" exclaimed her mother, "have you any idea how much money it takes to keep up this house? It needs a dozen servants to begin with."

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"But you could do with half a dozen, you're such a manager."

"Dearest, it wouldn't work; curtailed expenses would demoralize the maids—in a smaller house, with less to do, perhaps—"

"I love my beautiful home, I don't want to give it up," insisted Helen. "I don't know what Hugh would say if he knew about it."

A smile went around the small circle. Impetuous Hugh would have had plenty to say. Helen herself had a sudden spirit of fight born within her; she left the arm of her father's chair and settled herself on a favorite low stool, her elbows on her knees, her pretty chin buried in her hands, deep in thought. She was silent so long that her mother said, at last:

"Asleep, dear?"

"No, I've been so accustomed to considering ways and means, that I just forgot myself. I've been President of the 'We are Seven Club,' and have been on so many finance committees at College, that the business part of me has developed enormously; the girls all tell me I'm a born financier."

Mr. Ormesby laughed, and Helen looked decidedly nettled, a little pucker came on her forehead and her eyes grew bright.

"Of course, I don't deal in millions," she said, "but the hundreds were troublesome enough, and the dollars and cents were simply appalling to any but a level head. Father, you've got to keep sober and listen to my words of wisdom;" she jumped up as she spoke, and shook him, more in sorrow than in anger. "Is this consultation to be fair play," she asked, "or have you settled everything, leaving me only the privilege of doing as I'm bid?"

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Mr. Ormesby rose with a bow and a flourish. "Any suggestion from Miss Ormesby will receive immediate consideration."

"Very well, then; of course I won't come out next winter. Don't look so distressed, Mother, I am still young, and there's always some finishing off to do. Do you know, not one of our devoted 'Seven' wanted to leave College—unless perhaps Sylvia Browne, and she could have been persuaded to stay on."

"You're not thinking of a post-graduate course," cried Mrs. Ormesby aghast.

Helen rapped upon a nearby table. "Patience, my dear Madam, and hearken to words of wisdom; I *was* thinking of a post-graduate course, but not at College."

"Where, then?"

"Here, in this very house, where we are going to live next year—and study."

"We! Who?"

"Why, the 'We are Seven Club'—now don't throw in an objection until you hear my case. Here you have a set of unfledged housekeepers, turned loose on the world, not one of us has a single practical idea on the subject. We've all been so accustomed to having things done for us that we've never paused to consider how they were done. Now why shouldn't we all live here for a year and study the science of the thing? Dismiss your six maids and take in the Club; we'll try and give satisfaction. The girls would be willing to pay handsomely for such a liberal education."

"Helen, are you crazy?"

"No, ma'am, far from it. What they pay would be what would be needed to run the house in its accustomed style, and few among them live as well as we do, thanks to your fine housekeeping, Mummie dear. You see my

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idea is this, dismiss the underlings, we 'raw hands' will take their places. Keep the heads of departments, your cook, your seamstress, your upper housemaid, Phyllis, of course, and John and Jerry. Tell them if you like, that we wish to try an experiment next year, that we are going into training under them, to become good mistresses. It will tickle their sense of humor, I'm sure. Oh, what fun it will be—can't you see it, Mother? You shall be the Advisory Board. We will take over the whole care of the house, and turn and turn about, with the practical work; there isn't one among us who wouldn't enjoy it, and to see this stately home move on wheels of our greasing will be just wonderful. Oh, let us try! Take down that horrid sign in the area and let us see if we can't work out our own salvation."

"My dear girl!" said Mr. Ormesby, "your theories are all right, but you are only voicing one opinion—where your own immediate interest is concerned. The other girls may think differently."

"I've brought them through harder problems than this; girl problems are mighty tough, I tell you. They are all coming to luncheon to-morrow, suppose we sleep over it to-night, and you give me your answer in the morning. Only tell John to remove that sign at once, I really couldn't sleep in a house which was 'For Rent.' "

Helen was so much in earnest and there was such sound common sense in what she said that Mr. and Mrs. Ormesby forgot to laugh; the magnetism of the girl suddenly swept them along. Wild as the plan had seemed at first, there was yet a great deal in it which appealed to them both. Helen was certainly right; in practical, every-day duties, the College graduate was as helpless as a baby. There was much to consider, but

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the house was quite large enough at least to give the thing a trial, and since launching Helen in society would be impracticable, why not humor her little whim and let her have her chosen cronies for another happy year!

Then company broke in upon them, and Helen flitted among them in her pretty gown, charming them all with her radiant young presence.

It was quite late when she sought her bed, but before closing her window for the night, she thought she would see if her eloquence had had any effect whatever. She stepped into the tiny French balcony and looked down into the area for the aggressive sign which she had declared would haunt her dreams. It had disappeared!

CHAPTER II

A GOLDEN streak of impertinent sunlight, falling aslant of Helen's closed eyelids, woke her with a start; she opened her eyes in sleepy wonder, then she rubbed them, child-fashion, and got her bearings. Yes, of course, she was at home, and she looked with lazy pleasure around her room. It was prettier, she thought, in the bright glow of the morning than in the summer sunset of the day before; the curtains at the windows were rustling as the morning breezes came dancing in, bringing little scent-laden gusts of air from the outside.

" 'Oh, what so rare as a day in June!' " cried Helen as she sprang out of bed. "This must be the kind of day Lowell wrote about, I guess; it goes to one's head like wine. Come in, Phyllis."

And so the day began when Helen, as fresh and glowing as the rose she had fastened in her belt, went downstairs to breakfast. She found her mother alone, bending a rather thoughtful face over the pleasant duty of making coffee.

"Where's Daddy?" she asked, when the two bronze heads had come together for their morning kiss.

"A bit behind, as usual, dear, or perhaps *I* hurried more than usual. I thought we could talk over things before he gets down; he is somewhat skeptical over it all, Helen; says you are a castle-builder and will have walls tumbling about your ears, and all sorts of direful things will happen."

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Helen's rippling laugh rang out; Mrs. Ormesby smiled sympathetically.

"Nothing unpleasant *could* happen, Mummie, with seven lusty young women all pulling the same way."

"But are you sure they *will* all pull the same way? Remember, dear, even in this short time they've all had their eyes turned in another direction."

"They are 'The Seven,'" said Helen decidedly. "I don't think you quite understand the significance of that, Mother. I've been their mouthpiece and their headpiece for four long years; it will take more than a few days to obliterate my influence; besides, we are perfectly devoted, and when I explain the situation they'll be eager to help and be helped. It's the mothers we'll have more trouble with. *You* are reasonable, dear; but Mrs. Browne and Mrs. Barton, I'm afraid of their kind; they have to be handled very carefully. There's *your* job cut out for you; those ladies have social aspirations. If their bait is stronger than ours, those silly girls will bite, and it would be too bad to lose Sylvia and the twins; they are jolly little souls, the very sort to make practical housekeepers, and give vim and spirit to the whole thing; all the others who have high ambitions will be harder to train, for they will have to be hauled down from the heights and pinned to earth—I know them; so we can't spare the butterflies, whatever we do. Mother, I'm a great psychologist; watch me handle the Club at luncheon to-day."

"You certainly have the greatest faith in your own powers," laughed Mrs. Ormesby. "Do all College graduates begin life with such assurance?"

"You think I'm conceited, I know you do," Helen's tone was somewhat rueful, "but, honestly, I'm not; I'm only talking of my strong points just now. Oh, I'm as

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full of faults as—as Swiss cheese is, of holes, and I'll be the greatest idiot at all this practical work; but when it comes to managing my Club—" Helen finished with an expressive wave of her hands.

"You can't deny that you are a very revolutionary young person," said Mr. Ormesby from the doorway, where he had paused to listen.

"Now, Daddy, come here and be scolded," cried Helen, wheeling round upon him. "How dare you say I'm a castle-builder! Our castle is already built; I want to live in it, that's all, and as for my being revolutionary, our noble ancestor, even the good Sir Hugh himself, loved and wedded a revolutionary damsel; it runs in the family."

"Poor unoffending Dame Prudence! I dare say she was a simple, timid little soul, quite overshadowed by her big martial husband," said Mrs. Ormesby.

"All the same, I love the pretty tradition which seems to have bound them together. It's a very romantic setting for our family. May I show the girls our garnet, Mother, and tell them the story?" Then a sudden thought brought its accompanying smile; "I can point my moral while I'm adorning my tale. Don't you see?"

"Perfectly, perfectly, you've a head for things, Helen. Miss Ormesby, I salute you," and taking the bright face in both hands, her father gave her his morning greeting.

But there was something bantering in his tone that the girl vaguely resented. She pushed away a little and faced him with a new, sweet gravity which he could not quite understand.

"Father, I know we shall make mistakes, I am quite sure *I* shall, and there'll be many a laugh at our blunders; but **now** I'm in real earnest, I want to fit myself for

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something more than—than—living in this beautiful place and having everything done for me. I want to feel that if—changes came, I could do something for myself. I'm sure there isn't a girl among us who wouldn't think as seriously about it as I do. But don't laugh at us at first, please—promise."

"Solemnly, upon my word, I've indulged in my last laugh," declared Mr. Ormesby, impressed by her earnestness. "I'll be frank with you, however, so we'll start fairly. In many ways I think the experiment will be good for you, you'll gain wisdom if you don't earn your laurels. But whether you will have business head enough to carry the project through, I very much doubt. Remember, I leave the financial side in your hands. My own plan was to live on half our present income, which I will supply. It is up to you, my dear, to contribute the other half, so there will be no material change in our way of living. That seems to be the scheme as I understand it."

"Yes, exactly."

"Then go ahead, with my blessing. When do you propose to start?"

Helen's face cleared; she liked her father's crisp, emphatic way of talking; that meant business.

"Just as soon as I can load my ship; it takes time and prudence. Mother and I will have our hands full just at first, arranging and planning. Oh, it will be such fun!"

He ran his hands through his hair in comic dismay.

"I protest! I cannot have your mother drawn into this vortex. The first gray hair that shows itself will be laid at your door, young woman. Give me my coffee, Marian, this is too much!"

"Calm yourself, gentle sir, the duties of the Lady of

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Ormesby will remain unchanged; 'twill be the effort of our noble 'Seven' that our lady's white hands shall perform no menial service."

" 'Tis well, fair damsel, see to it that this be so. Now to breakfast and get down to facts. What is the first move? "

"The girls are coming to luncheon; after that—the deluge. I look no farther," said Helen, with a laugh; then she gave her father a warning look, for the maids were bringing in breakfast and the subject was not yet ripe for household discussion.

Mr. Ormesby left home with a lighter heart than he had known for many weeks; it was good to have Helen back, to feel the youthful, buoyant presence in the house, to know that it would be there after a long, harassing day of business, and that his wife would feel the sunshine of it when he could not. For the past four years the great house had been very desolate and lonely, with Hugh at sea, and Helen at College; but now, even if times were to be a little anxious, there would be no monotony in their daily life, there was nothing monotonous about Helen.

Indeed, the whole household seemed to feel this, for the air hummed with preparations for the luncheon, and when Helen descended to the regions below in her mother's wake, the kitchen actually palpitated with excitement.

"Sure an' it's glad I am to see ye, Miss Helen," and Ann, the cook, with the freedom of long service, offered a flour-dusty hand. Helen took it and sniffed delightedly.

"Gingerbread, as I'm living! Let me look, Ann, I love to see it rising and puffing on the top."

"Lave that oven be!" growled Ann, her professional

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instinct aroused at sight of Helen stooping to open it. "Ye'll have that gingerbread sittin' down like a pancake. Beggin' yer pardon, Miss, but it ain't likely you've learned to cook where you come from. You stand to one side an' I'll show yer," and as Helen obediently arose, Ann placed her portly form in front to keep out draughts, and opened the door with elaborate care while Helen peeped over her shoulder.

"And cookies, too, I declare!" she exclaimed. "Ann, I believe you knew I was coming."

"An' well ye might think so, an' me bakin' an' brewin' from Monday till Friday; them cakes is the tail-end, see?" and Ann swung wide the pantry door, exhibiting such a tempting array of good things that Helen exclaimed in wonder:

"Why, Ann, I do believe you've killed the fatted calf for me."

"Niver a bit of vale, Miss, from June till October, but ye won't go hungry, I may say that."

"You're a wonderful cook!" cried the girl, choking a laugh. It would never do to offend Ann at this stage of the game. "I shall go into training and you shall teach me."

"Oh, go 'long wid ye!" said Ann good-humoredly, she had bullied Helen from the pinafore days up. "You'll be trainin' for the two-step while I'm stirrin' the pot."

"Wait and see," said Helen, smiling and shaking her head, then she roamed around the spacious, well-appointed kitchen, listening with much interest while her mother gave the day's orders.

How easily and gracefully she did it, and how thorough trained the servants were! Could the "Seven" ever fit in, and would Ann be willing at the crucial mo-

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ment? Helen glanced at her own pretty, well-kept hands, and at Martha's red ones. Martha was the little scullion and dish-washer, one of the despised "underlings" whose place was to be filled by the usurpers. She looked beyond at the spotless table where Bridget sat peeling potatoes. Bridget was the laundress, and peeling potatoes was not her vocation; but she had dropped in on a visit to the kitchen, and Ann kept her visitors busy. Could any one of the "Seven" peel potatoes? She looked out of the window; John, no longer the spruce young footman, was digging in the little garden where parsley and onions and many kitchen herbs were allowed to grow. In his overalls, with his tumbled hair and earth-covered hands, he appeared like a genuine tiller of the soil, though he looked up and touched his forelock in the old fashion, when he saw Helen.

This tour of inspection was at her own request, and she followed her mother upstairs to the dining-room; here Mary, the waitress, was setting the table for luncheon. In one corner of the room was a great gardener's basket filled to the brim with a rainbow pile of sweet peas.

"Oh, how delicious!" cried the girl, on her knees in a moment, her nose buried in the fragrant mass. "Did they come from the Farm, Mother?"

"Yes, Jerry brought them the first thing this morning when he drove in the wagon with supplies; you know we get all our milk and butter and eggs and chickens, and most of our garden produce from the Farm."

"Oh, how interesting! Then even this big household is worked on economic principles."

"Well, I don't know about the economics, dear; we produce so much more than we can consume; but we are good to our neighbors and to the poor, so that equalizes

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matters," said Mrs. Ormesby tranquilly; but there was a sparkle in Helen's eyes—she would tackle that problem presently. Now she was intent on watching Mary's deft movements. She was a pretty girl, and she went about her work in a graceful, capable way, while the table, with its fine damask and silver, fairly glowed at her touch.

"Is it to be a sweet-pea luncheon?" asked Helen.

"Yes, miss, and there seems to be no end of them to-day."

"Which means that Mary will make a lovely table," said Mrs. Ormesby.

"Oh, if you're going to decorate, may I help? I love to fuss with flowers."

A blank expression chased away the pleased look on Mary's face. Mrs. Ormesby caught it and laughed.

"Don't worry, Mary, I sha'n't allow Miss Helen to interfere; some day perhaps you shall teach her some of your pretty secrets; now, however, she would be glad to sit and watch you."

"Mary is an artist," she explained, turning to her daughter, "and with that huge basket of sweet-peas she'll make fairyland."

And fairyland it certainly proved to be. She designed an exquisite table-center of the dainty blossoms; she traced an arabesque upon the cloth; she fashioned true-lovers' knots upon the corners; she laid graceful bunches, backed with delicate ferns and tied with leaf-green ribbon, at each plate; she gathered up an armful of every color and threw them loosely into a great glass bowl of water; and all this with a motion so quick and delicate that she scarcely seemed to touch the flowers she handled. Helen drew a deep breath of awe and admiration; she was finding out that there were many things the "Seven"

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could not do, and she also marveled at the capable way in which her mother managed every department of her household, as she followed her from floor to floor, from room to room, in her morning's progress.

"How will we ever suit!" she groaned, when the two found themselves together in her mother's pretty boudoir. "Indeed, Mummie dear, you'll have to be blind and deaf just at first, until we come up to your standard."

"I have trained even greenhorns," said Mrs. Ormesby hopefully. "You only got a 'bird's eye' view this morning, Helen. Are you daunted?"

"Not at all," said Helen stoutly. "The bigger the problem, the greater the victory. Wait and see!"

But it was a thoughtful Helen who ran downstairs to welcome her friends. The six came trooping up the steps of the big gray mansion, laughing and chatting all at once.

"We all piled into one taxicab," explained Elsie Barton, "the man objected, said it was too heavy a load, the usual talk you know, but Edith put an end to that. 'My good man,' she said (you should have seen the air with which she said it) 'you are not driving a horse, and an electric motor does not care if we are three or six, of course you can double the fare on us—but that will be cheating. Get in, girls'—and here we are!"

"Bad for clothes, of course," said Sylvia, "but it's a slim fashion with no starch, and we all took off our hats till the crucial moment when we arrived."

"Yes, that was the funniest thing, cabby supposed that we'd all tumble out together, but no, we descended with dignity, one at a time, each girl carefully adjusting her hat beforehand, and it took ten minutes to disgorge us; the man's face was a study. I wish you could have

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seen it, Helen. What would he have said, I wonder, if there had been the usual 'Seven'?" and Ruth raised her hands to take out her hat-pins.

"Come upstairs, girls, Phyllis will help you," and Helen led the way with pardonable pride, for the beauty of the place impressed them as it could not fail to do—as it always did.

"How you could bear to stay away four years from such a heaven of delight, I can't understand," said Alice Barton. "There is nothing old-fashioned or odd about it, and yet it's so—so ancestral."

"We *are* ancestral; we're a very old family, early English, I mean. We came in before Cromwell's time."

"How lovely!" said Ruth. "Then, of course, you have the family tree and the family jewels."

"Yes, I'm going to show you the famous garnet after luncheon. It's almost legendary."

"To live in a place like this from one year's end to the other, is my idea of bliss," said Sylvia, "and yet you're not 'a proud and haughty onion.'"

"Why should I be? There are so many things outside of a handsome house that money cannot buy, and often there's the splendor of real age. Josephine, for instance, has a home worth looking at. Why, girls, in her music-room, there are instruments dating from the flood, I do believe."

"That is Arnold's hobby, you know, Helen, and the wonder of it is that he can play them all. That boy is going to do something great yet."

The girls were standing in the circular hall looking down into the beautiful rotunda.

"What a place for a dance!" cried the twins in chorus. "What a glorious début we could make," said Elsie. "Mamma, with one of us on either side, standing

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just in the shadowy curve of the grand staircase to receive the guests, and the band hidden away on the other side. *Our* place is big and handsome enough, but it's too much like the regulation thing, four walls and a crystal chandelier."

"Don't talk about coming out, you silly dears," said Edith Carlyle. "I'm trying to coax Papa out of the notion. Aunt Meg wants to come down to Glenhurst right now, and take me in tow, and cart me to all the fashionable watering-places, and superintend all the deadly dull ceremonies next year. I tell you, honestly, I'd rather be shot. Oh, Helen, what a dream of a room!" for by this time they were in front of her door, thrown invitingly open, with Phyllis waiting to relieve them of their hats and gloves and to smooth rebellious locks.

"I just hate to think that our 'Seven' must disband," said Josephine regretfully.

"I wish you could all spend the winter with me," said Helen, artfully putting in her first wedge.

At this, a smile went around; the idea seemed so delightfully improbable.

"It *would* be jolly, we'd leave our happy homes for this. Don't mind her, girls, the atmosphere of this place has touched her here," and Ruth touched her own forehead significantly.

Then they trooped down like a flock of butterflies, eager and hungry for their luncheon.

Mrs. Ormesby was well-known, and a great favorite with this small and select circle; she seemed like a girl herself, in her pretty white gown, and her gay and cordial sympathy with the fun that soon began to sparkle round the table. From time to time she glanced at Helen, but that young woman seemed oblivious of the fact that

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there was anything more serious at stake than appeasing the appetites of six hearty, wholesome girls. Peal after peal of laughter rang through the beautiful room. It seemed that the Club had never been so brilliant as at this hour of its supposed dissolution, but it was not until the last course had been served and the servants had withdrawn, that Helen rose with a certain impressive gesture that brought the others to their feet. She lifted her glass of water and they followed her example.

"Girls, this is the last public function of the 'We are Seven Club.' Let us drink to it."

The girlish pose, with the lifted glasses, was very striking and picturesque. Mrs. Ormesby leaned back enjoying the pretty tableau. A shade of gravity had settled down upon them. Ruth set down her glass, untasted, with a little emphatic gesture that splashed water on the tablecloth.

"I can't do it," she said in a choked voice. "We've had such fun—it's been such a success—the 'Seven'—I—I just hate things to end."

"For a future novelist, that's a bad trait," observed Sylvia, though she, too, set down her glass, untasted. "Don't prejudice us against your books before they are written. I've heard of novels without heroes and heroines, but they all end somehow—thank goodness!"

"We might keep up the Club by correspondence, like the Chautauquans do," suggested Josephine, "and we could meet once or twice a year and have jolly little dinners and luncheons."

"Heaven forbid!" cried the Club in such vehement chorus that Josephine retired abashed.

"Better think over my proposition and spend next year with me," said Helen quietly.

Edith Carlyle turned her beautiful blue eyes plain-

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tively on Mrs. Ormesby. "How long has Helen been delirious?" she asked, "I caught some such feverish muttering before luncheon. Do you take her temperature every hour? An ice-bag on the top of the head is excellent."

"Thank you, Doctor, but I don't need heroic treatment, Mother understands the case perfectly. Now listen, girls, I'm in deadly earnest," and then in a clear, concise manner, that really amazed her mother, she explained the situation.

They all listened attentively, and when Helen finished with "So you see, it will be a sort of a Mutual Benefit Association," the air was unmistakably full of suppressed excitement.

"It's the best scheme I ever heard of!" cried Sylvia, who usually voiced the enthusiasm of the Club. "Sounds like the Chief—she has such original ideas. But my! we're an ignorant lot. You'd have your hands full, Mrs. Ormesby; you'd have to set aside a special room for whipping us into shape."

"No, I would have nothing to do with it, except to give my orders, at least that is Helen's idea. But, of course, at present there is only a hazy, unformulated plan. There is much to consider, your parents, for instance."

"Wait a minute, Mummie dear, we've got to vote on this thing first; that's the rule of the Club. All in favor, say 'Aye!'"

It rang out unanimously.

"Oh, my prophetic soul, my Mother!" exclaimed Sylvia.

"And ours!" cried the twins. "Why, she's been shopping all this morning getting the prettiest things for our coming-out gowns."

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"You'll have plenty of chances to wear them, for it is not going to be all work and no play. Think of that rotunda to dance in," added Helen slyly. "My brother Hugh will be due in these parts next winter, too, and there'll be dances on the ship, and plenty of Ensigns and young Lieutenants to take care of."

"You certainly paint a glowing picture," said Elsie, "if Mother could only see it!"

"So far as I am concerned, I have only poor Aunt Meg's tears of disappointment to battle with. Father was rather in sympathy with me about coming out. He was only afraid it would be lonely for me at Glenhurst, and he'll be delighted to have me so near at hand, and so happy, as I should be here with Helen. You know—" and Edith's flowerlike face put on what the girls called her "rapt" expression—"I am more interested in the serious things of life, the great army of the poor of New York, and the hospitals, and the little crippled children."

"Yes, you could take them one at a time on your afternoons out," said practical Helen. "You know if the 'Seven' are to make the scheme a success, there will have to be strict attention to business, especially at first when we are all green."

"Is it to be a regular course?" asked Josephine.

"Why yes, from *a, b, c*, up, and the first lesson we'll have to learn is, to know just what we don't know, I suppose," and Ruth sighed. "I seem to be learning that every day of my life."

"There's one great comfort," said Helen. "We'll all be in the same boat, and if the mistakes don't capsize us, we will pull into smooth water."

"Oh, it's all very well for the Club to talk and plan!" exclaimed Sylvia. "We are not the real masters of the situation. A year in this heavenly place would be an

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education in itself. And such fun! But the parent question is very serious; we have left them for four years to shift for themselves. They need looking after badly."

"That seems to be *my* mission; being a parent myself, I may be able to manage them," said Mrs. Ormesby. "I feel rather selfish in the matter, as I'm not only retaining *my* girl, but trying to steal theirs. Perhaps we can discuss it all satisfactorily, at tea to-morrow afternoon. You girls stay away, be discreet in speaking of Helen's startling idea, and let us see what will develop from a little rational conversation."

"Bravo, my dearest Mummie! Girls, I am quite sure her eloquence would convince a cow, so why not those very superior animals called parents? Here's to them! since we flatly refuse to bid farewell to the 'We are Seven Club,' " and rising to her feet, Helen tossed off her glass of water, while the others followed her example. "And now I shall show you the garnet, without which the house of Ormesby would fall to pieces."

She led the way into the library and Mrs. Ormesby unlocked the door of the little cabinet where the precious heirloom was bestowed. The girls looked with awe upon the faded blue velvet case she drew forth. She touched a spring and the cover flew back, disclosing a brooch of dull gold and of curious workmanship, in the center of which glowed a magnificent garnet. This emblem of fidelity and constancy made the jewel of greater value to those who possessed it than even a rarer gem.

"I don't know how many centuries before Cromwell's time it came into the family," said Helen, "but when the old Covenanters turned out the Cavaliers, Sir William Ormesby, a grim old Roundhead, rode out to Ormesby Castle and took possession of his dead brother's lands, though Hugh, the baby heir, was a lusty, sturdy little

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fellow. Now the legend runs that this garnet, at the first shadow of treachery or evil-doing, would disappear from its setting in some odd way, and would never be restored until the wrong was righted. Young Sir Hugh and his mother and sister, managed, with the help of a faithful servant, to escape to London, and with them—quite unknown to any one but the nurse—went the Ormesby garnet. She had taken it from its setting, in the treasure-room where it was kept, and sewing it in a little silken bag, she had hung it as a charm around Master Hugh's neck. The old Puritan stormed when he found it had vanished, but the superstitious country-folk, who knew the legend, shook their heads and predicted disaster for the House of Ormesby. And sure enough a shadow fell upon the old place, for William Ormesby also believed the legend. True, the Ormesby lands and titles were his by conquest, but the Ormesby jewel was not with him, and his stern conscience could not banish the old tradition.

“Then, with the Restoration little Hugh came riding back to claim his own. He found his uncle and aunt dead, and only a slip of a Puritan girl, the mistress of Ormesby. It was then that Nurse Margaret, an old woman by this time, asked Hugh to give up the charm he had worn about his neck, and at dead of night, she unlocked the treasure-chamber and restored the jewel. So the next morning when the rightful heir went to search for it, sure enough there it was, in the center of this quaint old brooch. Fidelity and Constancy have since then been the family motto.”

“And I suppose Hugh married the little Puritan,” wound up Sylvia.

“Of course, there are their portraits behind you.”

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"How did the secret ever leak out, I wonder?" said Ruth.

"Somebody less credulous than the country people got hold of it, I suppose; but it makes a pretty tradition," said Josephine. "I like Sir Hugh's face, I know he made a good soldier."

"All the Hughs serve their country; that's why our Hugh chose the sea. At any rate, we Ormesbys are faithful and constant, and if we 'Seven' take hold of this idea, I've made up my mind to lead you to glory. Will you follow?"

"We will, we will!" they cried with enthusiasm, and Helen shot her mother a triumphant little glance.

Jerry took them all home in the great carriage they used for theater parties, and Helen and her mother stood on the broad stoop waving their handkerchiefs till Jerry turned the corner.

"Well, Mummie, what do you think of the capabilities of the Club?"

"Wait 'till the enthusiasm dies down," said Mrs. Ormesby cautiously.

"It never will!" declared Helen. "That shall be my special mission. Wait and see!"

CHAPTER III

THERE was a problem yet to face before clearing the forest of difficulties; the six head servants were to be told of the coming change.

"Because," said the wise and far-seeing Helen to her mother, "the parents will be sure to make a great clatter over it to-morrow, and *they* will be sure to hear, so why not let them know beforehand?"

"Very well, ask each one of them, separately and privately, to come to the library after dinner. It seems a pity to deprive your father of *all* the fun."

"Let me see," said Helen, "we want Ann and Bridget, and Mary and Phyllis, and John and Jerry; and oh, I forgot, Miss Pierce; never mind, she's a separate problem to be tackled later."

Promptly, therefore, at half past eight, Ann's vigorous knock sounded at the library door. Ann was a portly, handsome woman, with bands of dark hair smoothly brushed, sleeves pulled down, and a fancy white apron replacing the checked gingham of the kitchen. She showed as much surprise when the three maids, followed by Jerry and John, appeared, as they did at seeing her.

There was something very impressive about the fine old room, with its shaded lights, and they all seemed so ill at ease, that for a moment Helen was at a loss. This interview had been left entirely in her hands, her father and mother being only amused and silent spectators.

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Suddenly an inspiration seized her; she pulled out a few stools from their shadowy corners, and waved invitingly.

"Won't some of you sit down? I am going to myself, for I want to tell you something."

Ann and Jerry being the oldest of the group, were persuaded to this breach of domestic etiquette, sitting awkwardly on the edge; the others being younger and more graceful, preferred to stand. Then Helen launched forth in her characteristic way.

"Those young ladies who took lunch with me to-day," she explained, "all have beautiful homes of their own, but they know nothing of housekeeping. Now, when I was in College, I used to boast, every time a box came from home filled with delicious cakes and pies and pickles, that we had the best cook in America, and when they came here and saw how beautiful everything was done, they were just wild with delight; so I've invited them to spend a year with me, if their parents consent, and I've promised to ask you all if you would be willing to teach us your secrets. We want to learn from the beginning how to do the things which seem to come to you so naturally."

There was a stir among the silent group; Jerry crossed and uncrossed his legs, Ann unfolded her arms, there was a look of battle on her face; the three maids giggled a little, John coughed discreetly behind a deprecating hand.

"You see it is this way," went on Helen in her friendliest manner. "Mother promises to dismiss all the other maids, if you'll agree to take us on in their places for just this year. It's to be like a big housekeeping class, with you as teachers. We want to learn everything, from the lowest to the highest, and—and of course the teachers will receive extra pay. *We* are going

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to get nothing at all, but lots of experience and heaps of knowledge, so that when we have homes of our own we shall be as wise in ruling them as my mother is."

"Sure an' I could wish ye no better luck," said Ann approvingly. "It's many a year I've been here, Miss Helen, an' niver a cross word. But howiver am I to get on with me cookin', an' a lot of greenhorns bouncing about, beggin' your pardon. An' the stuff I'd send up to the table would turn me sowl sick. Ah shurra! couldn't yez all git another hobby horse to ride! My land, ma'am," Ann cast an appealing glance at her mistress, but Mrs. Ormesby only smiled and shook her head.

"I promised Miss Helen not to interfere, but if you all would take her and her friends in hand, I am sure they would be grateful." It was very little to say, but the gentle, courteous saying of it disarmed their sturdiest foe. Ann turned a mollified glance toward Helen.

"Miss Helen, I've a rale good snappin' Irish timper; whin things goes wrong in the kitchen I lay about me good fashion, ivery green fool I've taught needs shoutin' at. I'd lose me place if I done that to you or your friends."

"No you wouldn't," said Helen, "that's just exactly what we want."

"An' is it me an' John that will be teachers, too?" asked Jerry. There was a twinkle in his eye, for he remembered the time when Mrs. Ormesby herself was but a slip of a girl, and he had to teach her to drive the most skittish horse in her father's stable.

"In more ways than you think," said Helen, with a sage little nod. "I'd like to begin to-morrow and drive out to the Farm with you, Jerry; maybe we'll all go. Could you take us in that three seated country carriage? We could pile three on a seat—we'll see about it later."

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"As for these girls," she continued, smiling at the bashful maids, "they will have their hands full. For there's mending and darning and house-cleaning and waiting on table and ironing, and a dozen other things we'd have to learn, I can't think of them all now, but if you'll agree to help us out—"

"We will, miss," said Mary, with her charming smile.

"You might go down and talk it over," suggested Helen, "and if you've all agreed, let me know to-morrow. In the meantime say nothing to the other maids, we will make no changes this summer. It is all to begin in the Fall, you see, when my friends come back from their holiday trips."

Jerry paused in the open doorway as the others passed out. "How about the carriage, Miss Helen, will you be wanting it in the morning?"

Helen looked at her mother. "Don't you think it would be nice for the 'Seven' to spend the day there, pending the decision?" she suggested. "We can make a regular picnic out of it."

"The very thing," said Mrs. Ormesby. "The Farm is at its loveliest just now. There are several messages I'd like to send to Mrs. Dennison, too, for we are going to close this house in about a week, and I want everything shipshape out there."

"All right, Jerry, unless you hear further, have the carriage at this door at half past seven," and Jerry, still with the amused twinkle in his eye, followed the others downstairs. He found the subject under brisk discussion in the front room where they congregated in the evenings.

The voluble tongues of the three girls were wagging freely now, and Ann was raising the storm that had not

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dared to burst forth upstairs. Jerry paused and listened in much amusement.

"Talk of the cackle of hens!" he exclaimed, "you women folk could give 'em a half a mile an' beat 'em in the race. Now just you listen to me; I've been serving in the Darcy family twenty-five years, an' Miss Helen's half a Darcy. It's no idle talk she's givin', let me tell you, she's goin' to carry this scheme through or my name's not Jerry. It ain't your place to laugh at her neither, you'll have the laugh froze on your faces, see if you don't. Miss Helen means business, an' I for one am goin' to back her up. Johnny, here, has got to think as I do, or there'll be old Harry to pay. I won't have Miss Helen laughed at, not when I'm around, take that now, and mind, John, you have them horses hitched up to the light summer carriage, by seven sharp. You'll not be wanted, I'd rather have your room to your company, as I am to drive all the young ladies to the Farm."

"What's up there?" asked John in a broad grin.

"I don't know, and I'm not presumin' to ask. It's my place to drive and take orders, it's yours to shut up and ask no questions." Jerry stalked away to his comfortable quarters above the carriage house, while John, much abashed, escaped from the chaffing of the giggling maids into the butler's pantry, where he had some finishing work to do.

Meanwhile Helen arranged her little impromptu picnic over the telephone; the girls were all anxious to go, and promised to be ready when she called for them.

The morning rose fair and cloudless; Helen looked out of her window and saw Jerry sitting still and patient, in the pretty carriage before the door. As she ran downstairs for a bite of early breakfast, she knocked at her

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mother's door in passing, for Mrs. Ormesby had a few last messages for Mrs. Dennison, the housekeeper.

"Good-by, Mummie dear, good luck with your part of the game; bring all the parents round, and we'll put you on a pedestal and crown you with laurel. Is Daddy in his dressing-room?" He appeared on the threshold, brushes in hand.

"I wish I were going with you; it must be glorious out among the hills. Did you know that Dorcas had a 'brand new' family?"

"No, you don't say so. Oh, the dear little puppies! The girls will go mad over them."

"They are not the only new things; there's a calf and a colt, and Rebecca, our noble and only sow, has a litter of pigs, and as for the chickens—"

"We'll have some for lunch. Take care of yourselves, good people, I'm off."

It did not take Helen long to collect her guests, and such good time did Jerry make, with the help of the spirited bays, that by a few minutes after eight, they had crossed the ferry and were speeding along the country road.

"We might have come by train and missed all the beauties of the drive," said Helen from her perch beside Jerry, "but the winding roads and the views of the everlasting hills would pay even the busiest for a little wasted time."

"I should think so," said Ruth; the horses were pulling the carriage slowly up a hill, and the girls could look down upon an undulating, fertile valley spread beneath them, with its background of blue sky, and in the distance a shimmering line of water; then as suddenly the road would dip into another valley, and the hills

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would rise up around them, towering, graceful, green-clad hills, with the breath of the wild flowers still lingering in their forest depths. Once they rolled through a pretty little village, and again they traveled in the open, passing villas in wooded parks, and finally they struck into a country road, bordered on either side by dog-roses, and the air was full of indescribable sweet odors.

"This is the beginning of Father's estate," explained Helen. "We drive for miles before we reach the house. And the roads from here wind slowly, as up a mountain pass, for the house is on the summit of the hill. As the carriage draws up in front of the steps, I can promise you a wonderful view of the surrounding country."

They reached their destination long before noon, much to the surprise and somewhat to the consternation of good Mrs. Dennison; she was accustomed to seeing Jerry at unexpected moments, but Jerry and a carriage full of strangers, was a most unusual sight indeed at this season.

She came to the door in a flutter, her cap awry and a dazed look upon her usually placid face, but Helen, springing out before the others, flung her arms about the substantial form, thereby smothering all ejaculations, as the girls came up and were formally presented. Then after resting for an hour or more, on the long, delightful veranda, Helen left them with Mrs. Dennison and went with Jerry on a tour of inspection.

Everything that money could devise had been done to improve this beautiful spot, and Nature had been specially kind; nowhere in all the country round were the trees more beautiful and majestic, or the ground more fertile and yielding.

Jerry led the way proudly to the gardens, Helen was always so eager about the growing things, and the old

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coachman was equally as good a gardener and overseer.

"Things is up ahead of time this year, what with the early spring and no frost in between. I'll show you prize corn and tomatoes, Miss Helen, to say nothing of my strawberry bed over there. We could supply a market with what we throw away, more's the pity."

"That's what I want to ask you about," said Helen, perching herself on the low stone wall which bounded the gardens. "That's why I wanted to come out to the Farm to-day. I want to consult you, Jerry; I want to make this Farm pay."

"You, miss?" Jerry's face creased itself in its slow broad smile.

"Yes, and I'll tell you just a little more than I've told the others, because I want you to help me, and the Farm is a big consideration. We are going to experiment next year. Father will be a little tied up in his business and he has given me permission to do what I can to keep our house running as it is now. It strikes me—with the outlay of a big wagon—we could do a driving business among our friends in town, who would be glad to buy from us, and it seems a shame to waste all these fine products, to say nothing of the butter and eggs running to ruin."

"That's right, Miss Helen," said Jerry approvingly. "There's a lot to be made on a fine old place like this, and not takin' the bread out of people's mouths, either."

"That's what I always thought," declared Helen. "I'm going to make you my steward, Jerry, and let you manage out here, for of course I'm very ignorant about everything; but I'll get you your customers and keep the accounts, and I believe the Farm will pay for itself in the end."

"Sure, I've always said so, with the right sort of

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handling," said Jerry, a shade of respectful admiration creeping into his tone. Then they plunged into an animated discussion, which included every known fruit and vegetable under the sun.

Meanwhile, the girls on the veranda chatted with Mrs. Dennison and enjoyed the lemonade and little cakes she provided for them. Then she took them through the quaint old house, some portions of which had seen Revolutionary days, pausing here and there beside a picture or a bit of furniture, to tell some story of the past, for the old lady had seen several generations beneath that roof, and knew every tradition and superstition that hovered around it, and there was nothing she liked better than to have an eager audience hang upon her words.

Something in the bright young faces of the girls roused all her most hospitable feelings.

"I must scare you up something for luncheon," she said, "or I shall be in Miss Helen's black books. Do whatever you like, my dears, I won't be long," and she bustled away.

Josephine found a fine old piano in the drawing-room. It had mother-of-pearl keys, and the wood was beautifully inlaid in floral design; it was very old as well as very handsome, and the girl opened it reverently and struck a few mellow chords. Her trained ear caught the beauty of the notes, and slipping on to the music-stool she gave herself up to dreams and harmonies, forgetful of all about her.

Edith Carlyle settled herself in a great armchair, to wonder and listen, which she usually did when Josephine played. Sylvia and the twins were in the big old-fashioned library, looking over the stacks of magazines which Mrs. Dennison collected during the year; but Ruth

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was restless, she could not bear to stay indoors away from the beauty of the day.

She laid herself down in the hammock in a shady corner of the veranda, staring at the clear blue of the sky, against which a spreading oak stood sharply outlined. What a place to dream in! Not with her fingers, as Josephine did, but “‘in my mind’s eye, Horatio,’” she said, with a sleepy little yawn. Then a sound smote her trained Western ear—the unmistakable neighing of horses and barking of dogs. She started up, alert and eager.

“The stables must be near,” she said, “and there are dogs, too—I wonder where?”

To wonder, with Ruth, was to investigate; she slipped out of the hammock and ran down the broad front steps. The sounds came from the rear; she turned her glance in that direction, and then followed her inquisitive little nose.

The stables were some distance away, but the sounds drew her like a magnet, for she was wild about horses. Every summer she lived in the saddle from morning till night, riding with her younger brother all over the vast prairie lands of her father’s ranch, and now it seemed as if the horses were calling her. As she came nearer she could see that the stable boys were rubbing down the bays after their long drive, and she noticed, besides, two or three beauties in the stalls. One proud mare had her colt beside her, and Ruth gave vent to a little shriek of delight. One of the men looked up and touched his cap.

“You’ll be wanting to see the pups, miss?” he asked.

“Oh, I didn’t know there were any. I came to see the horses, but I love dogs.”

“Here, Dorcas!” called the man, and down from

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the loft tumbled the happy family. The mother, a setter of exceptional breed, was a beautiful creature, with her long silky brown ears, and eyes of almost human sadness. The puppies, a silky mass of brown and white, were rolling and romping on the stable floor.

"Oh, you darlings!" cried Ruth, swooping down and gathering one of them in her arms.

"Look out, miss, he'll give you the slip; he's the wriggliest of them all."

But the warning came too late, the puppy was off and away before Ruth knew how it had happened, and before any one could give the alarm and close the stable doors he was in the open, scampering out of sight as fast as his short legs would carry him.

At this, Dorcas set up a motherly howl, but Ruth, calling to the man not to let her follow, tore after the puppy, who seemed to be making toward a distant hedge. The mischievous little fellow would look back once in a while and wag his stump of a tail; he was having the time of his life, once he could get on the other side of that hedge.

Ruth hoped against hope that he couldn't, but, alas! as he saw her gaining on him he hurled himself through with a baby yelp of triumph, and Ruth could hear his small feet making good time; she stood and wrung her hands. The hedge was too thick and too high for her to get through, and her best plan was to return to the stable. Suddenly her eye fell upon a thinned-out place evidently worn by passing to and fro; in a moment her lithe active young figure had squeezed its way to the other side, just as the tail of the scampering puppy whisked round a corner. Instantly the stillness was broken by a shout and a chorus of voices.

"Head him off, Will, head him off! it's one of the

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Ormesby puppies. Kitty, fly to that low fence, he may try to creep under. I'll stay here, for he'll be sure to come back, and then we have him—oh, I beg your pardon!" for the speaker, wheeling round suddenly, bumped smartly into Ruth, who had been running at top speed. The shock of the encounter bounced her glasses from her nose, and the tall, square-shouldered young fellow, stooping, picked them up and returned them with a bow.

"Pardon my clumsiness," he said. "I didn't see you coming, I was only intent on the puppy, it belongs to a neighbor of ours, Mr. Ormesby."

"Yes, I know," said Ruth, panting a little and mopping her hot face. "I had him in my arms; he acted like a greased pig and slipped through, and then he acted like a little imp of Satan."

"Never mind, the children will catch him, they've been sitting cramped up for too long listening to my nonsense, anyway. Won't you rest a bit? You look 'blown,' as we runners say, as if you'd lost your wind."

"I have—yes—thank you." Ruth dropped upon a bench he pushed toward her.

"Wait, I'll get you a glass of water," and he hurried across the lawn toward a pretty cottage, which she had not noticed before.

By the time he returned she was standing up watching with much interest the chase at the bottom of the hill. The poor bewildered puppy was cornered; it was a "toss up" to whom he would surrender. He made unsteady little runs from one side to the other; finally he laid himself down, with a vanquished little growl, between his jailors.

"Instinct is a curious thing, and 'dogibus' was right. Will would have tweaked his ears and Kitty

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would have spanked him; he chose the middle course, it's always best," and he laughed pleasantly as he handed her the water.

"Thank you," said Ruth, demurely, and as she sipped the water she glanced at the young man, whose eyes were following the victorious procession as it came toiling up the hill. Kitty was leading the way with the puppy in her arms, while Will followed more leisurely, the excitement of the chase over—there were plenty of fallen cherries to pick up and devour on the way back. He turned an anxious face toward her.

"Have cherries ever been known to kill people?" he asked. "If so, I tremble for that boy. I'm not exaggerating when I estimate his capacity at a peck a day."

"Has he been ill?" inquired Ruth.

"Not yet; the gods seem to smile upon him and me."

"You ought to knock three times on wood," suggested Ruth, handing back the glass. "Thank you ever so much for the trouble you've taken."

"What trouble?" He looked at her, and his gray eyes were full of merriment.

"Decidedly not handsome," thought Ruth, "but good eyes." Aloud she answered his question, "Why, for catching the puppy."

"I didn't catch him."

"No, but your little boy did, or rather your little girl—or I should say both."

He threw back his head, and his boyish laugh rang out.

"I am glad my age impresses you; however, I'm not the father of those kids, only an uncle. They are my sister's children," he added simply and with a touch of gravity. "Their father died when Will was a baby—

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Margie died last year. They have no one belonging to them but me, and I make a pretty poor substitute, I'm afraid."

Ruth's keen little face softened with sympathy.

"I am sure you do your best," she said, peering at him through her glasses. "You look kind—is this your home?"

"Oh, no, we are just summer boarders; we are on the Ormesby estate, you know. That little cottage is occupied by an old nurse of the children's—she has charge of the dairy out here—and has kindly taken us in while I make my plans for next year; but I beg your pardon—naturally this would not interest you."

"Oh, but it does," said Ruth eagerly; "every bit of real life interests me. I am an embryo author, you must understand."

"Oh, I see," again the gray eyes twinkled as they turned toward her.

"My name," she said, flushing a little under the scrutiny, "is Ruth Edgerton. I am out here spending the day with Miss Helen Ormesby and a few other College chums. I must hurry back now or they'll be missing me." She looked toward a spreading cherry-tree, under which the two children seemed to be glued.

"Will! Kitty!" He made a megaphone of his hands and sent the sound to them; reluctantly they advanced, the puppy struggling and writhing in Kitty's arms.

"He seems an unwilling captive," said the young fellow. "Perhaps I'd better carry him back for you. There's a gleam of mischief still in his unvanquished eye. Bring him here, Kit, I want to introduce you to this young lady. Miss Edgerton, my niece, Katharine Grey, **and** my nephew, William, of the same name."

The boy touched his cap, military fashion, the girl

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dipped a quaint old-fashioned curtsy. The little act of breeding impressed Ruth. She looked up into the face of the tall young man.

"And you," she said, "please, who are you?"

Kitty opened her big eyes. "Why, I thought everybody knew Uncle Fred. Shall I introduce you, dear?" she added, in a patronizing tone that convulsed Ruth.

"Yes," he replied gravely, "I think it would be better."

"Miss Edgerton, let me introduce my uncle, Mr. Frederick Marston Gayle," said Kitty, with her most old-fashioned air.

"Oh, come off, Kit!" said Will, who scorned the amenities. "He's just plain old Fritz—that's what he is—the jolliest old boy you ever came across, Miss Edgerton. Wait till you know him. Kit's been reading books with introductions in them, and she went to dancing-school last winter, so she's kind of stiff at the job—don't you like my way best?"

"I think I like both," said Ruth, "and I'd like to stay longer and make friends, but they'll be missing me at the Farm."

"Suppose we all see you back?" suggested her new friend. "The son of Dorcas seems restive and may give you trouble. Come along, kids. Miss Edgerton came in through your clearing in the hedge, so we'll go out the same way."

The rest of the "Seven" were on the veranda as the odd procession made its appearance. The young man took off his cap as Helen came down the steps.

"If this is Miss Ormesby," he said, "I take pleasure in restoring all of her property—her guest and her dog."

"Helen, this is Mr. Gayle," said Ruth, with an air

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of embarrassment. "Miss Ormesby, Mr. Gayle. And these are two friends of mine, Katharine and William Grey." The children's critical attitude relaxed.

"Pretty good for an introduction," declared Will, who seemed to be authority on such matters. Ruth sighed with relief.

"'Praise from Sir Hubert Stanley,'" she began, patting the boy's shoulder.

"I'm sorry to have given you so much trouble," said Helen. "Won't you come in and rest?"

"No, I thank you. I'm a near neighbor of yours and I know my way to the stables. If you'll allow me, I'll take the puppy there on my way back."

"Wait one minute," said Helen. "Dorcas is my special property, and I'm allowed the disposal of the puppies. Do you think the children would like this one?"

He had no time to reply. There was a shriek of delight from both children, and Kitty flung herself on the unresisting Helen.

"You're a perfect darling!" she cried, while Will shook her hands like a pump handle.

Their uncle laughed. "I think you're answered, Miss Ormesby."

"It's really Ruth's gift," said Helen, smiling at her friend.

"We don't care, so long as it's the dog," said Will, in true boy fashion.

"Dear me, Will, I must say you're rude. If it hadn't been for Miss Edgerton we'd never have seen the dog," cried Kitty, with the tact of her sex.

"What shall we call him, Uncle?" asked Will, ignoring the rebuke. "We've got to get a name right off, you see."

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"It's a pity you couldn't make his name a compliment to the givers; he's such a beauty, he'll grow up a prince among dogs," suggested the young man.

"I have it!" cried Ruth. "Call him Royal Highness. There you have the initial letter of my name and of Helen's, and as you say he is a prince, the title will be a fitting one."

"Good, good!" exclaimed Kitty, taking fire. "'Royal Highness' he shall be. Perhaps he is an enchanted prince or something—who can tell?"

"That comes of reading fairy tales," said Will scornfully, turning to his new friends. "She's always imagining such stuff."

"It isn't stuff," protested Kitty.

"I call it stuff," persisted the boy. "Girls are stupid things, anyway."

The light of battle flashed in Kitty's eye. The young man intervened at the critical moment.

"I think I'll get them home before there's bloodshed," he said laughing, and shaking hands with the two girls. He got between the combatants. "Off with you now, for a race to the hedge. I will carry the prince," and lifting his cap he too followed the flying figures with long strides.

"Well, it takes Ruth to have an adventure," called Sylvia, leaning over the stone balustrade. "Who is your knight, anyway?"

"I'd forgotten all about Lizzie's boarders," said Helen. "Father wrote me about them in the spring. Mr. Gayle is a young Columbia student. This is his senior year, I believe. His sister's sudden death left these children on his hands. Lizzie was their nurse once—"

"Yes, he told me," said Ruth.

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"And she wrote father," continued Helen, "asking permission to take them to board for the summer, while young Mr. Gayle made his plans. The children, it seems, have enough to support them, with no one to take care of them but this—well, he looks like a boy, though I daresay he's older. Father made inquiries about him at the University. They say he's top notch as a student. That's all I know, though I suppose we'll grow very chummy this summer, the children are such ducks."

"Aren't they?" echoed Ruth, with such enthusiasm that the twins giggled.

"Come to lunch, girls," said Helen, catching sight of Mrs. Dennison's beckoning hand.

That kind lady had the board groaning with the good things of the earth, and to say the girls did justice to the meal only conveys a hazy idea of the hearty appetites which bore down upon the home products. Mrs. Dennison beamed; nothing delighted her hospitable soul so much as this rapid disappearance of her jelly-cake and home preserves, to say nothing of the apple-pie that melted in one's mouth.

Such a lovely afternoon they spent, foraging about the beautiful place. There was little said about the new plan, though each girl had it uppermost in her mind. It was only when they gathered under the spreading oak at the side of the house, waiting for Jerry and his team to carry them back to the city, that Edith voiced the general anxiety.

"Oh, I wonder how everybody behaved at the tea?"

"They are probably at it now," said Helen. "I'd like to hear some of the 'pros' and 'cons,' wouldn't you?"

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"The 'cons' don't interest me in the least," said Elsie.

"In *my* lexicon of youth there's no such word as 'con,'" declaimed Sylvia, as they piled into the carriage.

The drive home, with the tints of the summer sunset touching the hills on every side, was very beautiful, a fitting close to their day; but it was a tired Helen who at last, in the empty carriage, drove up to her own front door.

John answered the bell, with a grin. "You're to go upstairs into the boody-wa, Miss Helen," he said, with a mysterious air; but there was no anxiety on his face, only suppressed mirth. "Dinner has been delayed, miss, a half an hour."

Helen tip-toed up to the boudoir. Her mother lay on the lounge, looking very girlish and pretty in her negligée. She waved her hand at Helen's approach; she looked very tired, but there was laughter in her eyes.

"Well, Mummie?" she asked anxiously.

"Victory, my dear girl, but behold the price!"

CHAPTER IV

THE summer days were over, and all the country world was dressed in gold and red and russet.

The city had one eye open upon the busy, stirring life down town, though above the line of traffic and trade there hung a drowsy silence. The big gray Ormesby mansion was still barricaded with its wooden shutters, and Helen, as she mounted the steps, accompanied by Phyllis and Mary, experienced a very odd sensation.

Hitherto, their return from the country had been marked by much state. Two or three of the maids had always come ahead to take down the shutters and open and air the place. Then Ann and her satellites arrived to get the kitchen into shape and attend to the marketing, so that on the final day, when the Farm was handed over to Mrs. Dennison for the rest of the year, Mrs. Ormesby and Helen usually donned their prettiest, and were driven in behind a pair of the Ormesby thoroughbreds. They had only to step from their carriage into their beautiful, well-ordered home, and the "moving" was accomplished.

But this year Helen herself was eager to take charge.

"I want to dig down to the very roots," she said to her mother, and accordingly, she stood now inserting her latch-key into the heavily wrought bronze lock.

She gave a little gasp as she passed into the close

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atmosphere of the shut-up house; the air was heavy with camphor, and the swathed chandeliers and furniture lent the whole place a ghostly look. This was intensified by a red and blue light which pierced the gloom at the farther end of the hall, streaming from a stained-glass window, high above the carved mantel in the *foyer*.

"We'll change our dresses first," said Helen, "and then fall to work. No, thank you, Phyllis," as that faithful handmaiden made a motion to carry up her suit-case, "I can do that myself; open all the windows, girls, as you go upstairs. I'd like to have the place fit to breathe in before the young ladies get here, and the three of us can do something, I fancy."

Her own room looked very sweet and cool and sleepy-looking, with its drawn blinds and its draped furniture, but Helen had no time to wonder or admire. In a jiffy, her hatpins were out and her hat laid aside.

She opened her suit-case and shook out the pretty blue linen housemaids' gowns which Miss Pierce had made during the summer for all of the girls. Each one was tagged with the name of the owner, so there was no trouble in selecting and slipping into hers at once. There were also seven trim-looking aprons and as many dainty caps, and when Helen stood equipped she made a pleasing picture.

These three active young women broke blithely into the stillness of everything around them. John, arriving providentially upon the scene, took down the shutters. Helen and Phyllis began to uncover the necessary articles of furniture, while Mary used her mop and broom with an energy which surprised even herself. By noon, the air of gloom and chilliness had worn off, little flecks of the autumn sunlight stole in through the opened win-

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dows, and Helen ate her luncheon in the great deserted dining-room, well pleased with her morning's work.

It was not much of a luncheon, but it was probably the first she had ever fixed for herself, and though there was not much art in cutting thin slices of bread and butter, setting out in tempting array the cold "bite" put up by Mrs. Dennison, and brewing a cup of the Ormesby's far-famed tea, she went about it in a dainty, practical way, suggestive of many things in the future.

She was thinking busily as she sat munching a sandwich; her summer had not been idle, she and Jerry had gone to work with a will, and the Farm, for the first time, was an undeniable and paying success. She had rung the curtain up on the new experiment by sending charming little notes to their many friends, explaining just what the "Seven" proposed to do during the coming year, and offering to send in their weekly supply of country products, including butter and eggs. At first Jerry undertook to drive the gay wagon with its tempting load, but Jerry had his pride to consider, and he owned rather shamefacedly to Helen that he did not like to stop at the back gates of houses where he had been accustomed to draw up his spirited bays to the front door.

"It ain't that I'm proud, Miss Helen, but I can't abide for them snobbish little footmen to come out and grin at me, and ask if I've lost my job. What you need is a responsible, reliable man for the work."

It was at this moment that the thought of young Mr. Gayle popped into her head, and it proved indeed a happy one, for the struggling young senior, eager to make some extra money, fell right in with her plan, with the result that it was largely due to his energy and activity that the scheme had prospered.

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She was expecting him now to make his weekly report, and she was anxious, too, to learn where he had bestowed his small family, for college was about to open. He would have his hands full if he wished to keep up his year's record and do his duty to the motherless children, who had already flung themselves, in their impetuous way, into his affections, and when John had ushered him in, she met him with her best welcoming smile, though he looked like a flourishing young teamster and she like an upper housemaid.

"Well, how goes it?" he asked, shaking hands and glancing at her admiringly. "Hard work becomes you, Miss Helen."

She laughed. "I hope that will be your verdict a year hence."

"Why a year?"

"Because that will be the end of the experiment. This is only the beginning, and there are mountains of difficulty to climb before then."

"You've proved your worth at tackling problems."

"Oh, things financial always appeal to me. I just love mathematics."

"Then here's a sum in addition," he said, throwing some coins in her lap and handing her a roll of bills. "Trade grows—I've ten new names on my list."

"You certainly are valuable. I hate to give you up."

"You needn't. If Jerry can bring in the wagon load each Saturday, I'll be on hand to go the rounds. It will add to my exchequer considerably, and while the kids have enough for their small needs, they can't run the whole show."

"Sit down and tell me all about it; have some lunch. I haven't left much, to be sure, but it may stave off

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pangs of hunger before you get home. Did you find a nest?"

"A jolly snug little one, just around the corner from the college. There's a little room where Will and I can double up; a tiny burrow for Kitty, big enough for her bed and her thoughts, if they don't expand to outrageous proportions, and there's a hole in the wall for the first unsuspecting maid I can pop into it. There's a good-sized living room, a bandbox of a dining-room, and a kitchen where you can't swing a cat, but it's bright and sunny, so let us be cheerful. I don't know how the Prince will stand it, though; *his* tastes are aristocratic, and the Ormesby stables would completely cover and hide the entire habitation."

"When do you move in?"

"We make our royal entry among the carrots and the late corn next Saturday. Will smells an adventure—Kitty views it mournfully; she dreams of chariots, like many another little Cinderella."

Helen laughed.

"Can't Jerry bring her in?"

He shook his head.

"I'd rather not. Kit reads too many books that tell of luxuries. She'd have a top-loftical air with Will which would madden him, and there's no wide open space to fight it out. Besides"—Fred flushed a little as he spoke, but he gave Helen a simple, direct look from those keen gray eyes of his—"I don't want the youngsters to like you or the others for what you can give them. I want them to be very independent, and there's only one way."

"You are right," said Helen, a comprehending light shining in her eyes, "and we girls will help you all we can. We'll have our own problems, you know; we're

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nothing but children ourselves, overfond of luxury, and taking without question what other people give us. This year will be the real test of whether we've earned our diplomas. I wonder if all the others are as eager to begin as I am?"

"When do you expect them?"

"At any hour from now on. Josephine Ashton is the first, as she comes direct from Philadelphia. The twins wouldn't go home, they were afraid the social whirl might draw them in, so they came down from the mountains. Sylvia's been traveling in Canada. Edith Carlyle has been among the Great Lakes, and Ruth has been lassoing wild horses on the prairies. All roads lead to New York, however, so we will dine together this evening, and a pretty jolly time we'll have. There's the bell now, wait and see," for he rose hurriedly as the sound pealed through the house.

"No, I'd rather not. I'll make my escape through the back door. Better have the coast clear and begin straight," and the discreet youth vanished with a wave of his hand, while Helen waved back as she hurried out into the hall.

It proved to be Josephine and her violin case.

"Am I the first?" she asked, anxiously peering into the deserted hall. "Oh, I'm so glad, for really, Helen, now that the die is cast, I'm in a panic. I wish I'd accepted your invitation to spend the summer at the Farm and get into some sort of harness. Mother thought that would be unfair to the others, but I don't think so. Any one could beat me at the practical jobs, I'm only good for this, you know," and she laid her hand affectionately on her violin case.

Helen gazed at her critically.

"You have such a soulful expression when you look

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at **your** violin, I wonder if I'll ever surprise a glance like that **when** you are gazing at a duster. Come upstairs, dear. We parceled out your rooms before we went away. There are three beauties on the third floor. Who would you like to have for a room-mate?"

"Edith and I have always been most congenial," began Josephine.

"Oh, goodness, no!" cried Helen aghast. "Two dreamers in one room will produce a nightmare. Take Ruth or one of the twins. They are levelers."

"You're not going to separate the twins!"

Helen nodded.

"Mother thinks it's the best thing in the world for **them**. They look so much alike, they do so many things alike, that it's grown to be an affectation, and for working purposes won't do at all."

"You are very wise," said Josephine admiringly. "How do you find out so much? You always were a wonder, Helen."

"I don't find out anything—I'm only groping and guessing, like the rest of us, and I'm going to make more blunders than all of you put together, because I'm going to steer in the dark. Come, now, 'first come, first served'; you shall have the choice of rooms and Alice for a chum. I think Elsie will fit in nicely with Ruth, and Sylvia—the every-day little butterfly—is the **very** companion for Edith, with her high-flown ideas of benefiting the world."

They ran up the broad stairs, and Helen leading the way, opened wide the doors of the three attractive bedrooms. The maids, with her assistance, had done everything possible to give them a cheery, homelike appearance. They were large and airy, daintily furnished **with** light furniture and chintz hangings, **while** in each

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room, drawn up on one side of the large open fireplace, was a most tempting little tea-table, with cups and saucers and a fat little tea-kettle.

"I thought after the labors of the day we'd like to congregate somewhere for a social dish, just like we did at college. I have one in my room, so there'll always be tea on tap after hours. Mother says it's a pernicious habit, but she relented when I explained that 'tea' usually meant fudge and frolic. There goes the bell again. If you are not too tired, Josie darling, get out of your fashionable rig and into this one." She pointed to the maid's dress and cap and apron, spread out on one of the twin beds. "I must be on hand to meet the girls myself."

The house soon began to hum. First came Ruth, burnt black from the prairie sun; Sylvia, singing the praises of quaint old Canada; the twins, all pink and brown from the mountains, and Edith, sweet and dreamy as ever, her fair, lovely face unmarred by the summer tan, her blue eyes looking "above and beyond," as Ruth expressed it.

Phyllis and Mary were on hand to lend assistance to the new arrivals according to the old-established Ormesby custom, but Helen shook her head.

"We'd better begin at once, girls, and help ourselves. If you are not too tired to lug up your satchels and get into uniform, we'll take a little practice with the duster. The library is still shrouded, and mother likes to have that spot cozy when she comes home."

"Good!" cried Ruth. "I feel strong enough to build a house at this present moment. If you'd ever been on a ranch and lassoed horses you'd appreciate my energy. Father has shipped two of my special pets to the stables here, so I may be able to exercise now

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and then. In the meantime, dusters for me. Where are our rooms, and what is my fate? I suppose we're to pair off."

"Of course. You are to take Elsie, Josephine will have Alice, and Edith and Sylvia are cut out for each other."

The twins looked a little aghast at being separated, but they were either too polite or too shy to say anything just then, and a few minutes later they were donning house-gowns, caps and aprons, and exclaiming over their pretty rooms. Then they fell upon the library, seven strong, flourishing dusters and chattering as they worked.

The first thing was to uncover the furniture. Phyllis brought a large basket, a pincushion, and a pair of scissors; one girl took out the pins and stuck them into the cushion; another snipped the necessary stitches, while the others shook out and folded the white draperies as they slipped to the floor, piling them up in the basket.

"I never knew it was such fun!" exclaimed Sylvia. "Why, work just flies this way."

"Naturally, with seven of us on the same job; but wait till later on. I've seen something of it on the ranch when help was scarce," and Ruth unfurled and shook out a duster in a capable way that provoked considerable applause.

The twins looked at their white hands and sighed in chorus, but no one noticed them, so they took up dusters without a murmur and fell to work.

Gradually the library emerged in all its homelike beauty, and as the many things of interest came to light they forgot the work in the pleasure of listening to Helen's descriptions, for she loved her home, and knew

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the history and tradition which hung around every treasured article.

But as the shadows fell and the library began to shine with its energetic polishing, Helen called a halt.

"We mustn't expend all our efforts in one spot. When Mary lights the logs I think all the summer mus-tiness will go. Now come up in my room, we'll have our initial tea and talk. I'm dying to hear what every one has been doing for the last three months. Bring your fiddle, Josephine. I vote for twilight music every day."

"Don't you love the crackle of a log fire!" and Sylvia curled herself up on Helen's rug with a sigh of satisfaction, for though the day was not chilly, it was cool enough to make even a little blaze feel comfortable, and the kettle on her tea-table was beginning to gurgle invitingly. The girls grouped themselves in characteristic fashion, while Helen fussed hospitably among her cups and saucers.

"Who's to begin?" she inquired. "Edith, the silent, we'll hear from you."

"Oh, I've been floating on the bosom of the waters, and mighty ones, too. I really hadn't intended to leave father this summer. The dear old place looked so beautiful, but after the experiment failed——"

"What experiment!" exclaimed a chorus.

Helen, who had gleaned something of it through Edith's letters, smiled as she poured the tea.

Edith flushed a little, and for a moment the white lids veiled the starry eyes; she looked so charming in her confusion that one of the twins patted her back encouragingly.

"Well, I daresay it *was* visionary; but father and I had a confidential talk one night, and I told him how

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I longed to do something to help people less fortunate than I was. I remembered a little disused cottage about a mile away from our house, and I asked him if I might have it repaired, and invite half a dozen poor children at a time to spend a week in the country. I thought a sight of so much beauty, after their dismal, crowded tenement houses, would do them good in many ways, and I had such fun getting things ready. There were only five rooms, two large enough to hold three small beds apiece, also a washstand and three chairs, a smaller room for the person in charge, a dining-room and kitchen. Oh, it was lovely!" and Edith gave a sad and reminiscent shake of her head.

"Go on," commanded Sylvia.

"I wrote to a well-known settlement and explained what I wanted. Of course, all the workers there were delighted. They wrote, asking which I would prefer, girls or boys, they had quantities of both."

"They always do," said Ruth.

"Well, I had a batch of girls up first. They were not so bad; indeed, they rather enjoyed themselves, I think, and Miss Nesbitt, who had charge of them, was really very nice. She and I had long talks about her work and what I'd like to do, and I was beginning to get very enthusiastic. One or two of the children were quite interesting, but would you believe it, they got homesick, they didn't like the soft earth, they wanted a good hard pavement to play 'jack-stones' on. They turned up their noses at the vegetable garden. I heard one of them say, 'We've got a fine wagon that comes around to our door without the trouble of pickin'; my mother has just to poke her head out of the window and sing out what she wants, and the kids gets it, an' she throws the money down in a piece of paper.'"

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The laugh went round at this, but Edith looked pathetic.

“ ‘The worst of my tale is to tell.’ I had the boys up the next week. They wrote me from the Settlement to let them work off their surplus energy and they’d be all right, but they didn’t tell me how much surplus energy they had. They were disgusted, to begin with, that the cottage wasn’t a camp; but they did all they could to demolish it, poked holes in the walls and ceilings, kicked the enamel off the beds, broke the faucets and flooded the house, and finally barricaded poor Mr. Stillwell in his room and read the riot act. If it hadn’t been that James, our gardener, was passing through the grounds at that moment, I don’t know what would have happened.”

“Who’s Mr. Stillwell?” cried the chorus.

Edith looked distinctly annoyed.

“You never let me tell things properly. He’s a young Harvard man who is spending his holiday in New York among the poor, studying conditions; he came up in charge.”

“It is always ‘conditions’ among the poor and ‘circumstances’ among the wealthy—isn’t it funny?” remarked Helen, passing tea and circulating fudge among her guests. “Go on, Edith. Did Mr. Stillwell profit by his investigations?”

“He got a big bump on his forehead. One of the boys playfully hit him with a stone. I had an awful time reducing the swelling.”

“Oh, you reduced it?” again the chorus.

“Yes, by cold compresses,” said Edith serenely. “Don’t be silly, girls; a regular trained nurse never thinks of anything but the emergency. At any rate,

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after that night's frolic Father decided that boys were not in my line."

"It's a wise father who knows his own child," observed Josephine in her quiet way. "What next, dearie?"

"The cottage was too battered for any 'next.' I decided not to direct my philanthropy that way. Crippled children haven't that destructive habit—Mr. Stillwell agrees with me."

"Experience is a great teacher," said Ruth, with a wise shake of her head. "Mr. Stillwell seemed to agree with you wonderfully."

"What's become of young Mr. Gayle?" asked Sylvia.

"At present he's my head man," said Helen, as she launched into a description of her summer's work, while the girls listened eagerly. "You see," she wound up, "as I'm to be the financial head of this movement, I want to make and save as much as I can, for we're going to come out on top at the end of the year."

"All but me. I'll be a pancake at the very bottom. I see my finish," groaned Josephine.

"Never mind, old Mozart, I'll boost you up," said Ruth consolingly.

"There won't be much chance for boosting," said Helen decidedly. "We've got to learn to creep first, and then to stand alone. Remember, we are still the 'We are Seven Club,' and I'm still the President."

"By unanimous vote," said Elsie.

"Then behold the schedule I've mapped out, and I trust the members will follow to the letter."

She went over to her desk and took out a folded document.

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"With amendments?" queried Sylvia, the wary.

"Of course, it can't go into effect except on vote, regular club rules, you know."

"Read it to us," suggested Alice.

"I've made copies for each one of you. It's too complicated to go into details. I'll read some of the headings:

HOURS FOR RISING

Week days	6.30 A.M.
Sundays	7 "

BREAKFAST SERVED

Week days	8.30 A.M.
Sundays	9 "

LUNCHEON SERVED

Week days	1 P.M.
Sundays	1.30 "

DINNER SERVED

Week days	7 P.M.
Sundays	6.30 "

DUTIES FOR THE SEVEN EACH DAY

One to the kitchen, under instruction and guidance of Ann. Two for upstairs work under Phyllis. Two for downstairs work under Mary. One to help Bridget in the laundry. One to do mending.

"You see, that apportions work to all of us in a general way for all the days. Does it sound too heavy?"

"N-no," said Edith doubtfully; "but I never washed a pocket handkerchief in my life."

"I scarcely think Bridget will let you do it now, but the art of ironing is a fine one, and Bridget is an artist.



“‘I’ll read some of the headings.’”

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To be able in any emergency to launder a blouse or a tablecloth or some necessary article is something, let me tell you. We girls are apt to wear our clothes carelessly. When they need pressing we must learn not to call on the servants, but to do the work ourselves. As for the mending—”

“Oh, that’s the easiest job of all!” cried Sylvia. “Anybody can mend!”

“Wait and see!” laughed Helen. “Phyllis is the mender of the family, and quick and skillful as she is, she’s never through. Indeed, that’s such an elastic department that any one who has any spare time can drop in and help.”

“Might a worm inquire if there’s any spare time marked on the schedule?” asked Alice.

“Loads of it; for instance, the one whose turn it is to help in the kitchen is under Ann’s instruction for only an hour, three times a day, the rest of her time is her own. And one thing, girls, we must always leave a margin of a few moments to lay aside our housemaid’s gowns before each meal. No matter how strenuous our work may be, we must always be freshly and daintily dressed. I don’t want Mother to detect a single creak in our working machinery.”

“Talking of clothes, I haven’t any,” said Sylvia. “My first afternoon out will be devoted to the dress-maker and milliner.”

Helen tapped the speaker on the head with the folded document. “You’ll find in here a set of rules debarring outside dressmaking and millinery, and by this time next year there’s nothing in those lines we won’t be able to do.”

“But—”

“My dear, that was mother’s ‘clincher’ in the tus-

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sle to get you here. We are all going to learn to trim our own hats and make our own dresses."

A groan broke from the twins, Josephine clasped her hands tragically over her violin, Edith lifted pained blue eyes to Heaven, but Sylvia stopped to think.

"Not a bad plan, all things considered. Dressmaking is a very superior accomplishment."

"And as for millinery," declared Ruth, "any one who writes a story can trim a hat. I've done it. In story-telling one must have a foundation on which to *throw* one's fancies; in millinery one must have a foundation on which to *sew* one's fancies. That's about the gist of it. The mind works the same in both cases."

As usual, the girls laughed at her sally, but Ruth generally hit the nail on the head. Unlike the others, she had been brought up in the freedom of out-of-doors, and had been forced to do many more practical things because her father's ranch was so remote, it was hard to get things from outside. So she and her mother had learned many little arts which were to stand her in good stead now.

"We'll be allowed to wear the clothes we have, won't we?" asked Elsie plaintively.

"Of course, you stupid child, one has to wear something. It takes time to learn, you know."

"Better wear the gowns you have than try on others that you know not of," extemporized Sylvia, thoughtfully munching her last piece of fudge. "Is that all, Captain? What's the next move?"

"To unpack our trunks. Some familiar bumping through the house warns me that they have come. Phyllis, I know, will feel defrauded, she loves to unpack trunks, but she'll be on hand to help and show us.

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I own I never did it in my life before. I used to bribe one of the maids at College."

"So did I. I always brought a last year's party-dress for Bessie, and she always found it in the bottom," said Edith.

"I'm afraid we've been a lazy lot," sighed Josephine.

"Well, we're here to take the cure. Does it sound so very bad?" asked Helen anxiously.

"No, indeed!" declared Alice. "Only I am so afraid we'll all be disappointed and not accomplish half of what we set out to do."

"Don't croak! If we accomplish half it will be something. Our cue to-night is to be dressed and ready to receive Mother and Father when they arrive in time for dinner."

"My idea," said Josephine thoughtfully, "is never to look farther than the next thing to do, then we won't see the mountains until we come to them."

"Bravo!" cried Helen. "Now play to us and everything will look easy."

It was a new Josephine who took her violin from its case as if it was some dearly loved child. The tall, slight figure bent and swayed as the music led her, and the flickering firelight in the fast darkening room cast dim, mysterious shadows as she played. The girls were quick to feel the spell, and Helen, from the depths of the lounge where she had flung herself to listen, fell to wondering what would be the outcome of this novel experiment.

She had fastened upon her young shoulders the heavy load of a great responsibility. She watched the girls' faces in the flickering light, brave, fair young faces like her own, and fearlessly willing to follow her.

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Yes, she *would* succeed, if only to prove to her father that she had a clear business head, to her mother that she had executive ability, and to other people that she knew something more than Higher Mathematics. A little sigh escaped her. Then she smiled and fell a-dreaming, while the tender, plaintive tones of the violin filled the room.

CHAPTER V

B-RR!" went the alarm clock in Helen's room. "B-rr, b-rr, b-rr!" went three other alarm clocks in the rooms upstairs; simultaneously, seven heads popped up from their pillows, and seven hitherto recumbent forms sat upright and rubbed their fourteen eyes; fourteen feet were hastily thrust into the fourteen waiting slippers, seven dressing-gowns were donned, and then complete wakefulness being established, the silence was broken. Helen ran upstairs with some papers in her hands.

"Here, girls, are your duties for the week. We're to turn and turn about, you know. Being hostess, it's my duty to brave the lion in her den. Ann arrived in time for dinner last night, so I'll take off the edge of her temper. Ann wouldn't hurt a kitten, but she growls dreadfully. To-day's my kitchen day. I'm wondering who'll prove the favorite below stairs. Half an hour for morning toilets. *Au revoir*, my fellow-workers. Phyllis and Mary will tap at your doors at seven sharp, or, better still, suppose we all assemble in my room and go our different ways," and Helen hurried on.

There was much subdued talk as the girls dressed in their blue uniforms, and the murmur of it came once in a while to Mrs. Ormesby, who had been awakened by the unusual sound of the alarm in Helen's room.

"I suppose I'm excited," she said to her husband,

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"but I'm as eager as Helen, to see how everything is going to work; I'd love to be up and busy with the others, girls do have such a lot of fun."

"You're nothing but an overgrown girl yourself," said Mr. Ormesby. "You'd mortally offend Helen if you lifted a finger. Think what a welcome we had last night. My dear, paid servants could never have given the radiance to the house that shone from it as we drove up, and those seven fresh young things, in their dainty evening gowns, were a sight 'for sair e'en,' weren't they?"

"It's what the place needs, and what it shall have as long as Helen is young—young spirits about it. It has been so empty for the four long years."

"It may be emptier still some day, our girl is growing up, and a very attractive girl she is too, let me tell you."

"Oh, I know," sighed Mrs. Ormesby, "but Helen's too full of many things to think of that quite yet."

"They all do in time, my lady, you were not as old as Helen, when—"

"Times have changed," and Mrs. Ormesby blushed prettily in the subdued light. "My education was a simpler matter, you see. Helen has her voice yet to consider before a husband can come on the horizon. How beautifully she sang to Josephine's obligato last night."

"To say nothing of your own piano accompaniment. You must brush up your music, Marian. You play too well to let these girls put you to shame."

"Oh, I feel half my age already, bless the children!"

Meanwhile the "children," booted and spurred, were ready for their tasks. Edith and Ruth, guided by Phyllis, went about the upstairs housework; Josephine

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and Elsie went downstairs with Mary, to the dining-room, and while that experienced damsel swept off the front steps and the sidewalk, they whisked their dusters with increasing skillfulness. Alice had been detailed for the laundry, but as Bridget wanted no help until after breakfast, she and Sylvia settled down in Helen's room with a big basket of mending, while Helen, with a timidity which was almost painful, descended to the kitchen.

"Here I am, Ann," she said, hesitating at the door, for judging by what she saw of Ann's broad back, the time did not seem propitious.

"Oh, is it you, Miss Helen? Sure an' I thought you'd be lavin' me a few days for reddin' up. I'm not fixed for company yet, such a kitchen, an' not a pot fit to put me hand into! Yez didn't give even a 'lick an' a promise' down here, I bet."

"Why, no," said Helen, "we thought—"

"Oh, it's always the kitchen that can take care of itself," said Ann testily.

"But I'm ready to help now," put in Helen mildly.

"Oh, go 'long wid yer! beggin' your pardon, Miss Helen, you'll be in my way, an' me in a hurry to get the breakfast."

A year ago Helen would have fled for her life, now she held her ground firmly.

"See here, Ann," she answered quietly, "you know this won't do at all. I'm glad I happened to come down first, instead of sending one of the young ladies, because," went on Helen, not heeding the smothered snort her last words provoked, "I know in the end you are going to turn just as nice as you can be and teach us everything we want to learn. Now where shall I begin, what shall I do first?"

"Get a half a dozen dish towels out of that deep

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drawer in the table," commanded Ann in her gruffest tones, which not even the wisest would have called yielding, "an' hang 'em on those rods over the sink."

Helen accepted the terms of capitulation, and meekly obeyed.

"Take that bowl and peel them potatoes, they're to be b'iled and hashed up for breakfast. That's about the best thing to trust you with just at first. There ain't nothin' can spile a potato, not even a bad cook. Here, don't you touch 'em with a steel knife, a silver-plated one's better, 'twon't stain your hands. Cut the pairin's thin, for goodness sake! I ain't goin' to waste things in my kitchen at this late day," and having established Helen, with her bowl of potatoes in a sunny corner of the kitchen, Ann again turned her back.

Helen pared deftly and quickly.

"They are ready," she announced in a few moments, such a very short time indeed, that Ann wheeled round in astonishment.

"Put 'em on," she said briefly.

"How?" queried the girl.

"In a saucepan, cover 'em with water and throw in some salt."

"Do they have to soak that way?"

"For goodness' sake, no, you light a fire under 'em and they cook till they're soft enough to stick through with a fork."

There was withering sarcasm in Ann's tone, Helen bent under it. "Yes, I see," she said in a subdued tone and accomplished the feat without further accident.

"I don't have to stand by and watch it the whole time, do I?" she ventured.

"Can you think of two things to onct?" asked Ann.

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"Why, yes, I've often had to think of a good deal more."

"Then chop up this here parsley," and Ann shoved a plate of beautiful green sprigs toward her.

Helen's hands flew nimbly; she was on her mettle now, everything depended on Ann's first impressions. The parsley finished, she demanded another job, and before an hour had passed, Ann forgot to growl or question, while Helen beat and stirred and sifted and mixed to her heart's content, Ann's eye ever watchful, guiding her inexperience.

"I have no idea how much depended on the proper way to mix things, you seem to know just what to put in first," she said admiringly.

"You've got to learn your letters before you can read, I guess. Well, it's the same in cooking. I couldn't bile a egg proper when I started, now it would take a whole barnyard to stump me I must say," and Ann folded her arms for the space of a minute, with pardonable pride.

"I suppose I *could* boil an egg," said Helen thoughtfully.

"Not if you had the sieve of a head that I did," said Ann, thawing into reminiscence. "I wasn't more than a slip of a girl when I went to my first place, dear me, dear me!" she sighed. "It was a young married couple, and they was beginning life very small, in a tiny flat. I was all the maid they had, but all they wanted in such a box of a place; the young lady wasn't much older than me, but she knew more about cookin' and was very 'bossy' I must say, which made me mad. One day she says to me, 'Ann, I'm goin' to have hard boiled eggs for the salad dressin' to-night. Can you boil an egg right?'

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'Sure!' I said, I was that mad. 'Very well, have a couple ready for me when I come home this afternoon. It's your day out,' she says, 'so just set them aside on the stove, where I'll be sure to find them.' Well, I put them eggs in a saucepan and set 'em to bilin' on the gas stove, and then I clean forgot 'em and went out. When I started for home about six o'clock it come over me like a clap of thunder, and the minute I set my foot in the house, I knowed what had happened, the smell of them eggs burnt close to the pot, most knocked me down. I rushed upstairs, my lady was home, and the flat looked like there'd been a fire, choked up with smoke till you could cut through it with a knife. I got my first walkin' papers that night, I tell you, and my last, I quit gallivantin' from that time. I sez to myself: 'Ann, if you must have followers, give up cookin';' you can't do both, but remember, cookin' pays the best.' I've stuck to it ever since, Miss Helen, and though I've got a mint of money saved up, enough to buy me a nice man," said Ann complacently, "you lose the cravin' for 'em when you get my size."

Helen bent low over the flour-sifter to hide the laughter in her eyes.

"I thought all good cooks made fine wives," she said.

"There's some cooks as ain't cut out for it at all, at all. That's not sayin' that a good wife can't get to be a fine cook if she tries, I was meanin' that there's no money in it, if you're married, and there is if you ain't." Ann emphasized her philosophy by two or three final and professional slaps to her dough, before she cut it out into pretty heart-shaped forms. "There now, Miss Helen, breakfast's ready to serve. P'raps you'll learn, there's no tellin', you ain't sloppy, and you haven't

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hindered much, but the Lord help me when the others comes along! You can't all be alike; there'll be some fool. I guess," and something like a smile stole round the stern corners of her mouth. "Lunching is at one," she called, as Helen was about to go, "and I'm not sayin' much, but I'm used to havin' help about here to straighten and clean up after me. Them as helps with the table and the parlor had best look in here a bit every day; Mary herself lends a hand when there's dinners or anything special."

"Very well," replied Helen, "I'll bring the others with me when I come for lunch."

"Ann didn't know it," she said, when she talked it over with the others, "but I left that kitchen with flying banners and the blowing of trumpets."

When the "Seven," rosy and eager, trooped in, hungry, for their breakfast, they gave the great room just the touch of living color that it needed. Mr. Ormesby cast aside his newspaper, Mrs. Ormesby nodded and smiled her brightest, from behind the tall silver coffee-urn, and the girls described their first morning's experience in a way that sent the laughter ringing to the rafters of the room.

And so, with gay good humor, the game began. A very serious game it proved in many instances, for the girls grew more and more earnest over it; they were a very plucky set, and the determination to "make good" on this venture, never weakened for a moment, no matter what ups and downs they had.

"I've made up my mind to one thing!" declared Sylvia, at one of their "tea talks" at the close of the first week. "I'm never going to speak of my failures."

"Poor dear! she'll grow quite dumb I'm afraid," said Ruth commiseratingly, whereat they all laughed, for

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Sylvia's many blunders had become a byword, but there was a streak of indomitable purpose in this gay little society girl, that none suspected, not even Sylvia herself.

She had more misadventures, during that first trial week, than all of the "Seven" put together; she had proved to Ann, during her day in the kitchen, that a bad cook can spoil anything, even potatoes, for she had forgotten all about them till the pungent smell of their burning brought down the wrath of the kitchen goddess; she beat up a cake under Ann's directions, but she forgot to put in the baking powder, and her spirits sank to the level of the flat thing she took out of the oven; she broke three bowls, as they slipped through her clumsy fingers, spilling their contents upon Ann's immaculate floor; in short she went out in silent degradation, from the presence of that potentate. She undertook to do the marketing one day, the girls all took turns, and raised a whirlwind above and below stairs when she ordered home, from the butcher's, four dozen chops instead of four pounds, as she had been told. She put castor oil in the salad dressing by mistake, when Mary entrusted her with that delicate operation.

"It was the most natural thing in the world," explained Sylvia. "The two bottles were standing side by side, and I took the handiest."

"But there was Castor Oil marked on the outside, Miss," expostulated Mary. "I had just laid the bottle down for a minute while I answered the bell, I was going to throw it out."

"How was I to know that?" demanded Sylvia, defending herself in a backhanded way.

"I didn't think anybody could mistake the sweet-oil bottle," said Mary, with withering scorn in her respectful

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tones, as she poured the sickening mixture down the sink in the butler's pantry.

"I'm only thankful that it didn't go to the table," said Sylvia devoutly, but she felt the burden of her shortcomings, nevertheless. Dusting terrified her, her pretty hands, accustomed to nothing more arduous than adorning her own attractive little person, were not to be trusted among the priceless bric-à-brac, and after a terrifying experience of brushing a costly Sèvres vase off of a high mantel-shelf, she confined herself to the heavy furniture and the bronzes, with a meekness not suspected in the high-spirited Sylvia.

"Another week of such damages, and I go home," she said decidedly.

"Poor old Sylvia, she'll find her niche some day, see if she don't," said Helen hopefully. "We've all got to have our downs; your's just fell in a bunch, that's all."

"I wonder where my niche will be," came in dejected tones from the depth of the sofa pillows, where Sylvia had buried her disconsolate head.

"That's just Sylvia's talk," said Edith placidly, "since we've been rooming together I've found out that Sylvia's only frothy on the top, there's good stuff below."

"Thanks, dear chum," said Sylvia mournfully, "I suppose there must be something beneath, though it will take a microscope to find it."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Alice. "Girls, you should see her mend and darn! Why Phyllis brought her an armful on that first day, and her fingers just flew, it was positively inspiring. I mangled and bungled over everything; she's a born genius."

"Oh, I could always sew," said Sylvia indifferently, "just because I didn't have to do it I like it I suppose."

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"But you'll have to do it now," said Helen. "Our sewing-room opens next week, Miss Pierce has been off on a holiday, and all who want clothes, prepare to make them then."

"I never made a dress in my life, except doll's clothes," declared Sylvia.

"The best sort of models. I prophecy you'll become a modiste; your creative faculty may lie along that useful line," predicted Ruth.

"I hope it won't lie along the line of my destructive faculty," sighed Sylvia, whose spirits were still weighed down by the broken vase.

"Have a cup of tea," said Edith cheerfully, "and here are some cookies I made myself. I begged a dozen or so from Ann to celebrate the occasion; help yourselves, girls. They're hard to bite, but they'll melt in your mouth if you give them time."

"A month would soften them nicely," observed Helen, cheerfully risking her good teeth.

"Dip them in your tea," suggested Elsie, "the combination isn't bad."

"It certainly saves time and trouble," remarked Josephine. "You build firmly, Edith dearest, if you had plastered your little experimental cottage with cookies, those bad boys would never have broken through."

"Oh, Ann says I'll improve in time," said Edith hopefully.

"Yes, time's the thing," and Helen laughed. "I said a month," and poor Sylvia forgot her woes to laugh with the others.

There was one enjoyable bit of the day's work, and that was answering the front door-bell when John was on duty on the box beside Jerry, and Mary and Phyllis otherwise employed, and if by chance it was the loud

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insistent ring and accompanying whistle of the postman, there was quite a flutter among the blue gowns as to who should be first at the door. Mrs. Ormesby had provided a pretty mailbag which they kept in the hollow seat of the great carved hall chair, and the postmen, who always took a lively interest in the houses along their route, usually delivered enough mail at the Ormesby mansion to quite fill the fat little bag.

On this special morning Elsie's sunny southern smile warmed the heart of the susceptible young postman, who made the first round, and he left with her a generous bag full. Elsie sat down on the long settee and looked over the spoils, then she slung the bag over her shoulder, postmanlike, and went about delivering.

"Six for you, Mrs. Ormesby," she called, tapping at the boudoir door.

"Come in, dear, and stay awhile, there's no hurry, is there?"

"I'm not sure—I caught my name on several delicious-looking envelopes, but I'm honest and they are at the bottom of the pile. No, I won't stay, thank you, the others are clamoring like mad things. Even Sylvia gets a letter from her mother every day, though she is right here in New York. You always look so sweet and cozy in here that I have to flee temptation." Elsie stooped and kissed the slim white detaining hand, and was gone like a flash.

"Two for you, Ruth, one a regular cowboy fist. Have you an admirer in a khaki shirt and a gray sombrero?"

"I think there are about twenty who would die for me," said Ruth modestly, "but calm yourself, this is from Allen, my seventeen-year-old brother, the other is from Father."

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“ ‘He’s the fellow that signs the checks,’ ” sang Sylvia from the other side of the bed; she and Ruth were making them together.

“ Of course,” said Ruth, “ Father’s very generous. There’s always a moment of uplift before I break the seal, during which time my needs grow prodigiously, then I look at the check and—and reduce the needs—and then I enjoy Father’s letter; he’s always so chummy and nice,” and Ruth plumped herself down upon the unfinished bed to devour the home news.

Sylvia received several crested envelopes. “ The ‘ Might-have-beens,’ ” she sighed. “ These are all my débutante contemporaries; they’re giving teas—well, I don’t envy them that, but when it comes to giving theater parties—”

“ Mail, mail, Elsie,” called Helen’s blithe voice. “ Who’s talking of theater parties? We’ll have plenty ourselves later on, and the opera—Ye gods! I’ll rifle that bag if you keep us poor patient mortals waiting much longer.”

“ There are two for Edith,” said Elsie, tumbling the whole pile on to a table, “ three for Josephine, and two for you, Helen, one’s from the College. How funny! it isn’t time for the Alumnæ notices—the rest of the bunch are Alice’s and mine. Come on, little twin, we’ll break our seals together. I wish these foolish people would stop sending letters to The Misses Barton. I don’t believe even our future husbands would dare to propose to us separately!” and Elsie departed to find her sister.

Helen took her letters to her own room; one was from Hugh, a jolly, foreign-looking scrawl, full of the dear boy’s life and fun; the other brought a slight color to her face as she opened it slowly.

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MY DEAR MISS HELEN [it began in the firm plain writing she knew so well]:

Rumors have reached the Faculty of the experiment you and your friends are making this year, and we have all been very much interested. Knowing the unusual hopes and aspirations of the "We are Seven Club," I confess I am not surprised that they have not disbanded, and I hope that during the holidays, which I always spend in New York with my mother, you will allow me to call and hear more than the meager details which have come to our ears.

You have always been so kind and friendly that I am emboldened to put in a plea for a little friend of mine, whose infirmity makes it impossible for her to earn a living in the usual way. She has been staying for the past year with my mother, as she is quite alone, but she is very miserable over her dependence. She is a skilled milliner, but her lameness has been much against her. Now if you or your friends could throw work in her hands—something practical that would not seem charity—I think you would not regret it, and I would be eternally grateful for any help you could give the poor little girl.

With kindest regards, believe me,

Sincerely your friend,

PHILIP TRENT.

P.S.—I do not generally indulge in this sort of thing, but I forgot to say my little friend's name is Rita Thornton, though on account of her beautiful bright hair and eyes, and a certain quick, vivacious way she has of doing things, we often call her Jenny Wren.

Helen sat in thought for a moment. She was pleased that Philip Trent had appealed to her, he was such an independent young fellow, and had been, ever since he became tutor at the College, three years before.

The girls had heard something of his history from the head professor. His father, a man of great wealth,

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failed suddenly, just after his son's graduation from Princeton. The crash pulled down many with him, and the shock was too great for Mr. Trent, whose health was poor. He died shortly after, leaving such a bare pittance from his wrecked fortune, that his son was forced to give up all private ambitions and accept the mathematics tutorship that came into his way. He had proved so efficient that he was now an instructor at the College, and a great favorite with every one, few dreaming of the tremendous sacrifice that he had made in giving up the study of law, which had been his ambition. The girls all admired and respected him, but he was very grave and reserved, and it was hard to get beneath the pleasant upper crust of him.

Helen's voice was the magnet which seemed to draw him out of himself, he had a fine ear for music, and the mellow, deep notes of this budding contralto gave him pleasure; so, little by little a friendship sprang up between them.

To Philip, the girl represented the best in the life that he loved; he liked to talk to her of the many interests and pursuits they had in common, and his manner lost much of its reserve as the friendship grew.

Helen was glad he had written, and as she folded the letter, preparatory to going to her mother, she thought with elation that it was more than possible that she could help the little lame girl.

"May I have a confab, Mummie?" she paused at the open door of the boudoir.

"Yes, dear, come in, I'm wanting a confab myself," and Mrs. Ormesby pointed to an open letter with a helpless shrug.

"Oh, the infants; they're crying for the usual donation, I suppose."

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"Of course, and donations are not in our line this year, yet I hate to refuse my poor sick babies, they need it so."

"What are they going to do to haul in money this time?"

"They suggest tableaux and charades, but there's nothing definite settled."

Helen's eyes sparkled. "If there's one thing in which the 'Seven' excel, it is in getting up tableaux and charades; when are they to be?"

"During Christmas week, so you see all the donations should be turned in at once; it's the first time I've ever had to refuse."

Helen pulled a rebellious curl which occasionally escaped from behind her ear.

"Why refuse now, why not offer your house and your services in getting up the tableaux? We'll all pitch in and help, and you can always charge more for admission into your own house. It's one of the laws of hospitality," she added quaintly.

Mrs. Ormesby laughed. "What a girl you are for planning, Helen! Schemes seem to seethe in your brain, but it's not a bad idea; I'll talk to your father about it, it would certainly ease my mind of a load, and I would at least feel that I was doing my duty by the poor dears. Now, what have you on foot?"

Helen read her letter, and Mrs. Ormesby was struck by the manly tone of it.

"What a nice fellow your young professor seems to be," she said.

"He isn't a professor—yet, but he may be some day, he's so clever. Now what I thought, Mummie, was, that we might get little Miss Thornton to come here and teach us millinery; we're all a perfect set of dunces, to

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be sure, but we must have hats, you know, and that's the cheapest way." Helen then launched into enthusiastic "whys and wherefores," until her mother promised to go with her that very afternoon and call on Mrs. Trent and her young protégé.

It was a quiet, unfashionable street where Jerry took them, and a big old-fashioned apartment house before which the carriage stopped at last. They crawled up in a very rickety elevator to the fifth floor, stepping out into a tiled marble hallway, brilliant with the sunshine streaming from the large windows at the head of the stairs.

A trim colored maid answered their ring and ushered them into a room filled with precious bits of furniture and rare ornaments, in which both Helen and her mother delighted. It was an unusually large room, bright and sunny, but fine lace curtains with hangings of heavy damask gave to the whole atmosphere a restful, delicate glow; then there was the faintest rustle of skirts, and Mrs. Trent came toward them with a friendly hand outstretched.

"This is very kind of you," she said, in her gentle, high-bred tones. "My son wrote me that you might come, and though I am glad to take some of this visit to myself, I am quite sure it is Rita that you would like to see."

"It is only a visit hastened," said Mrs. Ormesby pleasantly. "I've been promising Helen to pay this call for some time, but her need would brook no delay, and you know yourself, Mrs. Trent, what slaves we mothers are."

"I think we are pretty apt to hug our chains," said Mrs. Trent smiling. "I've heard a great deal of you

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from my son, Miss Ormesby; he wrote me only yesterday of his appeal to you in behalf of poor little Rita."

"I believe Miss Thornton will supply an aching void in our existence," explained Helen. "You see, Mrs. Trent, we're taking up a great new study this year—household economics—though we call it housekeeping."

"Yes, I've heard; Philip wrote me. It seems to me such a practical, splendid idea."

"It embraces dressmaking and millinery, of course, among other unknown arts, and unless we have hats our heads will not be of the slightest use."

"At least we could go back to Grecian draperies and scarfs," said Mrs. Trent comfortably. "We might as well—ah, here's Rita!"

Helen rose to pull forward a chair for the lame girl, who came in leaning heavily on her crutches, a pale, delicate little creature, with the aureole of rippling golden hair, as Philip Trent described it, and the most wonderful deep blue eyes that changed with every emotion. They grew almost black with excitement and eager interest when Helen drew her off into a corner and explained the situation.

"Oh, I should so dearly love to teach you!" she cried, clasping her hands. "There's so little I can do, you see. It was good of Philip to think of me, he is always thinking of people."

"My dear," said Mrs. Ormesby, "all the gratitude is not on your side; I feel convinced that Helen has found a pearl of great price. These girls of ours have made an iron rule for this experimental year; no hats or gowns to be bought outside; there isn't one among them who has not been pampered by having all the pretty things she wanted. Now, whatever they want, they must

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make, so your hands will be full if you teach them to put sense on their heads, as well as in them. Millinery is a high art if it accomplishes that these benighted days."

Rita smiled brightly, a smile that was like sunshine itself.

"I think you grasp the idea, Mrs. Ormesby. So few people use their minds in selecting a hat, the fashion is set alike upon the heads of sixteen and sixty, it makes no difference how appropriate or inappropriate."

Helen laughed. "Come, then, and teach us common sense, and save the twins from being extinguished; at present they are wearing hats that look like snuffers, obliterating not only their heads but their necks."

There was a laugh at this, and the talk became more general; but when Helen and her Mother rose to go, it was well understood that Rita Thornton was head of the millinery department, and would be at her post in the sewing-room twice a week from two to four o'clock, and mother and daughter drove off well pleased with their afternoon.

"Isn't she sweet?" asked Helen, as Jerry turned his horses' heads toward the park.

"Who?"

"Why, little Miss Thornton, though, of course, Mrs. Trent is delightful. What a lovely face, Mother, and what glorious eyes; she must have been a tearing beauty in her youth."

"There is something more than beauty in that face, dear; it quite puts me to shame to see how nobly she bears real poverty after all the luxury of the past; the very room shows traces of vanished splendor."

"Doesn't it? I love those dear wiggly 'leggy' things. Mr. Trent says they are really old, and could tell whole volumes of history, and his mother has it all

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at her finger-tips. I mean to see more of her. How good she is to that little girl! I saw you talking together; did she tell you about her?"

"Yes, Rita's father was one of the sufferers in the Trent failure. He died soon after, and Mrs. Trent insisted on taking the poor homeless girl right into her household; but the independent little creature moped and pined, until her son Philip thought of writing to you."

"I believe she'll prove our salvation; she really seems to understand the psychology of a hat."

"Well, *I* don't," laughed her mother. "I feel, with the author of 'Pigs is Pigs,' that hats is hats."

"Join our millinery class and you'll find they'll tell a far more eloquent tale."

"No, I'll wait developments," said the ever-cautious Mrs. Ormesby, as Jerry stopped at their own door.

CHAPTER VI

THERE'S some one for you at the telephone, Miss Helen." Mary paused at the door of the sewing-room and looked in with much interest. It was the millinery opening, and the place was strewn with all the implements of the trade—hats, hat-frames, silks, velvets, ribbons, flowers and feathers, while the "Seven" were gathered with respectful awe at the feet of little Miss Thornton, who was demonstrating her first lesson by making a hat for Mrs. Ormesby. Helen had a frame in her lap and was busily occupied in subduing the antics of an obstreperous piece of wire when Mary delivered the message.

"Alas! this was the crucial moment! All right, Mary, I'm coming. Dear me, Miss Thornton! after all my trouble; I had just grabbed that wire by its little black tail when I had to let it go." Helen tumbled her things from her lap to the work-table. "I won't be a moment," she said, but it was quite ten minutes before she returned, looking much amused.

"It was Kitty Grey, Mr. Gayle's little niece," she explained. "They moved in from the country last Saturday, and the poor child is at her wits' end; what with the tiny flat, and the arrival of some new furniture, and Will's teasing, and the Prince barking his disapproval, and her uncle being at the College, her reason seems tottering. She said Uncle Fred told her to telephone over here and ask some one, for the love of Mike, to go up and save her, and then she quite convulsed me by asking who Mike was, anyway; Kitty's of an inquiring turn of

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mind, you know, and most literal in her sense of humor. I told her we were busy, but at four we'd knock off work and run up for a while, at least some of us."

"I can't," sighed Josephine. "I have an hour with Ann, and another for practicing; I haven't touched my violin for days."

"There's a bag of stockings hanging from the chandelier in our room," said Edith. "I put it there to assail my vision, they must all be darned, you know; there are more coming—there are *always* more coming—I wish I could go, but you see I can't."

"I wonder how many undarned stockings there are in the world!" said Elsie ruminatively.

"Rather reflect how many poor wretches hide their holes within a deceptive shoe! I wish *I* could go," added Sylvia, "but it's my afternoon out, and I promised Mother and the boys to drop in for a bit of gossip. I'm to get back in time to help Mary arrange the dinner-table."

"Elsie and I want to wear our lingerie gowns to-night, but they are mussed, and Bridget says we must press them out ourselves this afternoon," said Alice.

"I had a dozen things to do, but I'm in for shirking, if you are, Helen; may I go with you? I feel a personal interest in Mr. Gayle and his family; I can put off commencing the greatest novel of the century till to-morrow," said Ruth. "How is this for a beginning?" and she held up a frame on which she was building a formidable black interlining. "I confess I can't evolve anything from this—what is your private opinion, Miss Thornton?"

"Why, to me it seems a most promising looking skeleton," said Rita hopefully.

"I suppose, when the plot unfolds itself, it will get

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more interesting. Am I to have roses or feathers for my *pièce de résistance*?"

"That's a mere matter of taste, the building comes first; you've only the foundation."

"A simple unadorned hat is much less bother than a frame; you've only to stick the trimming on, and there you are." Edith looked at her foundation ruefully, and shook her head.

"Yes, but it's not nearly so good a primer; one must learn one's a, b, c's, you know. Once you can make a foundation neatly, you have your hand in, and the pretty part comes more naturally."

"I'm afraid we'll never reach the pretty part, we're so stupid at this," sighed Josephine. "I wonder if we'll ever be able to wear the hats we make!"

"I will, if I put mine in the museum next day," declared Sylvia. "I'm really proud of mine, anyway."

And well she might be, for the pretty hands that fumbled over the kitchen work and broke costly vases, plied the needle with truly feminine skill; she had imitated all of Rita's professional turns and twists with astonishing results. The twins followed close on her heels, and Ruth was not far behind, but Helen, Josephine, and Edith struggled clumsily.

"We're too original," said Helen, sucking her rasped thumbs at the close of the lesson. "The others are distinctly imitative; we three have souls above hats. I know you've separated the chaff from the wheat, Miss Thornton; are we quite hopeless?"

"Dear me, no! Not artists, of course, like the others, but you'll learn," said Rita, beginning to put away her things.

"Ruth and I will take you across the Park. We are going to see Kitty, and Mother said I might have the

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carriage," and the two girls hurried off for their hats and jackets, while the others chatted with Rita, whose eyes sparkled, and whose cheeks glowed with the pleasure and excitement of this first day. To feel that she was really earning money, and that her skilled fingers could at last do the work for which she had sought so long, was something indeed to be happy over; she felt the kindly atmosphere all about her, and it warmed her heart. She little knew that the carriage had been specially ordered to take her home, and that under one pretext or another it would always be there on her afternoons; she only knew that life had suddenly grown very sweet and full to her, and that she owed it all to Philip Trent. So it was a happy, tired, and thankful little Rita who, leaning on her crutches, waved to the girls as they drove away from her door.

"We'll send Jerry back when we turn the corner," said Helen. "It's only a few steps to Kitty's, and if it grows too dark, why, Fred can see us home. Yes, I call him Fred," noting Ruth's look of surprise, "he's only a boy, and we've been thrown together so much this summer," she added, in such a superior tone that Ruth laughed.

"I daresay 'the boy' is older than you are, Miss Methuselah."

"Yes, I suppose so, now that you come to speak of it, but it doesn't seem so," reflected Helen. "There's something particularly boyish about Fred, even with his ready-made family. This is the street, and I believe they are to be found somewhere under the roof of that big building on the corner."

A tiny elevator whisked them skyward, stopping at the eighth floor, and Helen pressed the bell on the door indicated. There was a scamper, a bark, a smothered

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exclamation, and Kitty, flushed but triumphant, threw open the door. She gave a little exclamation, flung her arms around Helen, and extended a cordial hand to Ruth.

"Will wanted to open the door," she explained, as the ruffled head and flushed face of her vanquished brother made its appearance just behind her, "but I conquered for once—I tickled him on his knee-joints, he's a baby in my hands then; his knees are his weak points, like Achilles' heel," she added, airing her Greek myths. "Come in—come in—single file, please—two can't turn around together in this box of a hall; once you reach the parlor, you're safe. Don't hit up against things," she remarked as she led the way; "you're apt to get awful bruises if you forget. I'm all black and blue myself, but that's as much from Will as anything else; he jumps at me from dark corners, and I bump into anything handy. Now, here we are in a nutshell."

She stood on the parlor doorsill, and, reaching out, flung open the doors on either side.

"Uncle Fred's bedroom and mine; Will, of course, has to sleep with Uncle Fred, there's nowhere else for him."

"Nowhere else!" echoed Will, boiling over with wrath. "Humph! if Uncle Fred had been an Aunt—you'd have sung a different song, miss."

"But he isn't," said matter-of-fact Kitty, "and there you are! Here, Prince, Prince! come speak to the ladies. Isn't he a beauty? look at his ears and his lovely eyes, and see how he's grown. Uncle Fred says he'll soon be big enough to take the whole of this place on his back and walk off with it. Sit down, sir, shake hands, there—now bring me a letter."

The puppy looked around, spied a newspaper on the

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floor, made a dash for it, and brought it to Kitty in his mouth. "He's just as nice to Will," she added loyally.

"Better," growled Will. "He knows a newspaper from a letter when *I* show him off."

"I only wanted to show you that he'd fetch and carry," said Kitty. "He couldn't find a letter, so he took the next best thing, that's all."

"Sensible dog," said Ruth. "If we all did that, we'd be much wiser and happier. Now, where shall we start to help you?"

Kitty shook her head. "I'm sure I don't quite know. I wish all the chairs and beds and tables would get up and walk into their places. I think," she said mournfully, "we'll have to hang the chairs to the ceiling, let them down in the daytime, and draw them up with pulleys at night. Uncle Fred thinks it a good plan."

"Who's taking my name in vain?" said a voice in the doorway. "Oh, about the chairs! Yes, Kitty's right, only we're going to hang them upon the walls like pictures, instead of suspending them from the ceilings, and label them 'Grandfather's Chair,' 'The Cane-bottom Chair,' 'The Chair of State,' and so forth. I thought some good Samaritan would look in on Kitty this afternoon, but I wasn't prepared for two," and he shook hands in his hearty way.

"Did you have any trouble in getting in with your goods and chattels?" inquired Helen.

"Not the least. You see, the fiat had gone forth; it was 'With your trunks and on them,' for my small Spartans, and we came that way, didn't we, Kit? Not like the Countess Somebody or other, who traveled with nine trunks and a maid to take care of the trunks, and a courier to take care of the maid. We took care of ourselves, and a pretty good job we made of it, too."

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Kitty grew restive. "This isn't working," she said severely.

"No more it is," said Ruth, flinging off her hat. "What's the first thing on the carpet?"

"There's no carpet—it's all rugs—look out, Miss Ruth, you'll trip over them."

"Come along, Will, no drones in this hive. Come on, Miss Helen, I'm properly rebuked. Now, if the five of us can't get some order out of this chaos, my name's not Frederick."

"What we have to do," he explained, while they merrily fell to work, "is to build the interior of these rooms in such a way that there'll be space enough to squeeze through between the pieces of furniture. Poor little Kit is dizzy with trying to fit in things, but it will look quite roomy and palatial after a while, and we'll have the snuggest little home that ever was. Then the Kids will get to school in the neighborhood, and the Prince will enjoy the society of that unsuspecting maid we haven't captured yet. And *then*, if some one would give the fair Katharine a hint as to how to cook something hot for dinner, something that is *not* boiled eggs and toast, Will and I will be eternally grateful. Privately, we loathe boiled eggs and toast; perhaps you two ladies have learned other things during your week's experience."

"We're almost professionals," declared Helen; "we had a test luncheon last Saturday. Poor Ann! I felt sorry for her, but the seven of us invaded the kitchen, seated her in state, where she could direct, and cooked the meal. After a moment or two of glum silence, she entered into the fun, and was as excited as the youngest of us when the luncheon was ready for serving."

"What did you have?" asked Kitty.

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"Let me see! Ruth, help me if I forget."

"To begin with, I breaded the chops," said Ruth modestly.

"That is not the beginning, you know quite well," said Helen. "We served grape-fruit first; that's a safe thing to trust Sylvia with, she'll never make a professional cook, but she's good about extras, and she makes mayonnaise that stands alone, and dresses salads in the latest fashion. Oh, dear, you all look so hungry—I hate to go on."

"Please do," said Fred pathetically, "this is a regular Barmecides feast."

"Who was Barmecides?" demanded Will.

"An unfortunate gentleman who was forced to sit at a beautifully appointed table and make a dinner out of his imagination."

"How?" asked Kitty, whose imagination played no such riotous tricks.

"Well, his cruel host discoursed about the fine dinner, and while his servants passed empty dishes to the ravenous guest described their supposed contents so vividly that the poor man nearly fainted. Go on, Miss Helen."

"We had creamed fish balls and lovely little round potatoes with parsley decorations—I made them, with home-made bread that Elsie baked, then the breaded chops—works of art, I assure you."

"Let *me* describe them," broke in Ruth. "They were large and very juicy and tender, and they were rolled in bread crumbs and fried to a crisp, delicate golden brown."

"Oh, don't!" groaned poor Will, prone upon the floor.

"Josephine made some rice croquettes to serve with

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that. Then came the salad—Sylvia's little 'stunt'; it was perfectly delicious, eaten with some of Alice's Southern 'beat biscuits,' and Edith brought up the rear with baked apples—the finest you ever tasted," wound up Helen, and then she and Ruth leaned back in speechless laughter at the scene before them. Fred had slipped down beside his small nephew, both prostrate forms with their toes pointing heavenward, while Kitty was coiled in a limp heap upon the sofa, apparently in a dead faint.

" 'Give me food for Minnehaha,
For my dying Minnehaha,' "

quoted Ruth, when she found her voice.

Fred sat bolt upright. "Did any one say food?" he asked in a hushed voice. "Here, Will, rouse thee, rouse thee, man! Rescue is near. Take this bit of silver to the nearest butcher-shop and bring back two pounds of chops. This *ruthless* person returns not to her home until she hath prepared us some well-breaded chops. Miss Helen, we'll demand mashed potatoes of you, and mayonnaise. Will, a head of crisp, tender lettuce from the nearest grocer. Haste, haste, take the Prince with you, he hath need of air."

"But it's too early for dinner," objected Helen; "we have to get back before the *real* time."

"Had you seen our breakfast you would spare me the mention of such a mere figment of the brain as time," he remarked, as the door banged emphatically behind Will.

"Come to the kitchen," said Kitty briskly; "you can start in, I'll help—I love to, and then I can learn, you see. I must know something when we get a cook, for I'm to be mistress and sit at the head of the table

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and pour the coffee and tea and go to market before school every morning and make the housekeeping money last from week to week."

Kitty looked very important as she bustled around her tiny kitchen. She was a graceful, pretty child of fourteen, with the clustering golden curls and deep blue eyes of an angel.

Such fun they had over the simple meal they fixed up! When all was ready, Helen and Ruth waited on the table, while the food vanished as if by magic, and the girls bore off the empty dishes with a look of dismay.

By six o'clock the breaded chops were things of the past, and the girls were getting ready for home.

"You shall have a royal escort—the Prince and his followers," said Fred. "The Park is a happy hunting-ground for caged animals; Kitty and Will settle all their disputes in the open, that's a rule in the game. They keep a list of all their grievances, and whack at each other in fair fight; but I'm afraid Kitty will grow up a sad tomboy in our select society, unless her kind friends take pity on her sometimes and try to mend her manners."

"Why not let her join us once a week in the millinery class?" suggested Helen. "Friday after school would be a splendid time, and Kitty would then be forced to think of things truly feminine."

And so it was arranged—as they parted at the Ormesbys' door—that Kitty should be initiated into the mystery of hat making, in spite of the fact that her present headgear was a Tam O'Shanter, more frequently off her head than on it, and that Miss Kitty scoffed at the prim little girls of her own age, represented in the fashion-plates.

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The next week Miss Pierce came home, and the house was a subdued buzz of dressmaking. The lovely October days were drawing to a close and little touches of frost made the crisp autumn air like wine. The souls of the "Seven" were not above clothes, and on Miss Pierce's arrival wild shopping expeditions were planned, but the prim, precise little lady cut them short.

"Not yet—not yet! we are not ready for the new things until we renovate the older ones. The first things to make are new uniforms, after that there will be much overhauling of the pretty clothes you have already—and *then* the dainty new ones. We must learn slowly but surely," and Miss Pierce snipped away at the blue gingham, while the girls, under her direction, basted the simple gowns together.

The full hours sped delightfully; each one of the "Seven" looked upon her duties as real responsibilities, and as they fell into the even ways of the household, they marveled to themselves at the ease with which this large home was running, with comparatively so little effort on their part, and Mr. and Mrs. Ormesby watching their girl—ever vigilant—at the helm, directing everything, marveled more at that than at anything else.

And hers was not easy sailing, by any means. The girls were clumsy at first, and many of them hard to teach in one line or the other. The servants were often restive and hard to manage, but Helen brought persistent good humor and patience to her task, and being a born leader, she was an inspiration to the others.

"She's a regular Ormesby!" declared her mother with pride; "she has the brain of a financier. If she had been a man, she'd have been your right hand in your office, dear."

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"A pity to waste so much talent, I may take her in yet." His tone was grave, but his eyes were laughing.

"No, you would not; you don't believe in women working when they don't have to."

"True; but Helen is a genius—haven't you been trying to impress upon me what a shining light she is?"

"For Heaven's sake, let her shine at home while she can."

"You're not a progressive woman, I'm afraid," said her husband soberly.

"I don't know what you call progression. I'm not in favor of anything that keeps a woman from the highest duties to which God has called her. Helen, thank goodness, imbibed none of those new-fangled notions in College."

"What dreadfully old-fashioned ideas, my dear! You sound a century behind the times."

"Dear me! and I thought Mummie was so up to date." Helen paused at the open door of her mother's room, distinctly amused at the guilty start both parents gave as she came upon them.

"You two have been gossiping—and about me—what have I done? No dodging, Daddy, 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'—do you hear?"

"We said some very nice things of you, and might have said more, had you not been eavesdropping. It was merely a preliminary to a request I had to make, and you may as well hear it now," said her father laughing. "The truth is, I'm in something of a quandary; the annual meeting of our Directors comes off next Thursday. It has usually been my custom to wind up the business by a large dinner at Terry's—a private

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room, flowers, and that sort of thing; this year, of course, that is out of the question, but I *should* like to entertain them at home. What say you, Helen of Ormesby, will you help me out?"

"To the death, my lord! Have no fear, your dinner shall go down in history as the finest ever. We girls will go in training at once."

"Oh, I don't want you to cook it," said Mr. Ormesby in genuine alarm. "You haven't attained the perfection of chefs yet, and Ann at her best is quite equal to any emergency."

"Don't be worried," said Helen with dignity. "I was thinking only of the outside adornment. We shall wait on the table, open the front door, disport in the butler's pantry, and thus give 'tone' to the affair. Wait and see."

"But," objected Mr. Ormesby, "however praiseworthy, I wouldn't care to let those gentlemen know that my daughter and her friends—"

"They needn't know," said Helen decidedly. "By next Thursday night we'll be such a well-trained band that there won't even be a superfluous smile upon our faces."

All the ensuing week there was an undercurrent of excitement among the "Seven." Miss Pierce bustled about in her sewing-room, making black skirts and black silk blouses; Sylvia was shut up in her room with yards of lace and sheer white lawn, fashioning the daintiest of aprons; Rita Thornton's clever fingers made the pretty butterfly caps, and the rest dropped in at one place or the other to lend what aid they could. During the week a detail of two assisted Mary and Phyllis each evening at the dinner-table, a departure from the general custom; but the girls resolved to be perfect in all

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the most trifling points, and this seemed to Helen the best and safest way.

The two on duty were sure afterward of a most tempting little dinner served in Mrs. Ormesby's boudoir, whither the whole family repaired, to comment and criticise and suggest.

So by the time *the* night came round, Mr. Ormesby's uncertainty had given way to a happy feeling of security, and when his guests arrived he was perfectly easy in his mind, and as genial a host as if Terry was at the bottom of the whole affair.

The door was opened by Edith, whose flower-face bloomed beneath the flyaway cap, while Alice stood demurely by, to help off with the coats, pull aside the heavy curtain before the drawing-room door, and announce each guest.

After all were assembled, these sirens disappeared behind the scenes. One stayed in the butler's pantry, three helped Ann "dish up," and three took their places around the beautifully adorned dinner-table. When the meal was half over, these three were to be relieved by the downstairs group, and they in their turn would descend to Ann's assistance.

Josephine announced dinner, and even the unsuspecting and preoccupied gentlemen were extravagant in their praise of the beautiful room, with its effective lights and exquisite damask and silver and glass.

Ropes of smilax were festooned from the chandelier and caught at the four corners of the table by huge white satin bows, and the scheme of white and green was carried out in the daintiest manner. Mr. Ormesby was astonished; he had been kept in the dark as to their arrangements and preparations, and he tried in vain during the courses to catch the eye of one of the "Seven,"

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to smile his thanks and approval, but he might as well have approached seven graven images for any recognition he received.

As for the girls themselves, it was great fun, for occasionally they could relax in the pantry, and those below regaled themselves and Ann by their criticisms. But outwardly the dinner moved in solemn dignity, and when the gentlemen, at last, were left alone with their coffee and cigars, the "Seven" joined Mrs. Ormesby upstairs, where a charming dinner awaited them in the sitting-room, and they were glad to rest their weary feet, and be served by Phyllis and Mary, and recount their adventures.

"The worst moment was the opening of the champagne," said Helen; "the popping always frightens me, and Elsie says I shrieked, but I don't believe her."

"I shook in my shoes when I saw my own father was one of the guests," said Sylvia. "I quite forgot he was a Director, but I discreetly kept behind him most of the time, and escaped as soon as I could. Once I was terribly tempted to kiss that bald spot on the top of his head, as I do at home, but my good angel held me back and I fled in time."

"I wonder, Josephine, if you could hide somewhere behind a convenient curtain and play for them when they go back in the drawing-room," suggested Mrs. Ormesby.

"In this costume?" said Josephine.

"Why not, dear? The violin would sound just as sweet, and the musician need not be seen. Stand by the back stairway, so you can vanish quickly; go down that way, too, so they won't see you from the front."

Josephine took her violin and stole downstairs just as the gentlemen were rising from the table, and the

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others—listening from above—soon caught the delicate strains and held their very breath, for Josephine never played so well as when quite alone. The soul of this quiet, self-contained girl seemed to soar and break its bonds, and the plaintive notes of the violin spoke of the thoughts that are “too deep for tears.”

The sonorous voices of Mr. Ormesby's guests grew hushed as the girl played on and on, and when her bow drew its last quivering sigh there was just an instant's silence, and then a storm of applause. For a moment Josephine stood in doubt, whether to play again or run, but finally she drew her bow across the strings, and gave them one of those tender Scotch ballads, which they all knew and loved.

There was a deeper hush than before; these sober men, immersed in their big business problems, had little time to pause and look backward over the years; but the old-fashioned love-song drew them like a magnet, and many eyes were dim as the last strains melted away.

This time Josephine fled in earnest, and just as she had her foot on the stairs the sudden pealing of the bell sent her flying to the front door. She left the violin on the library table, smoothed her apron and settled her cap before opening the door. A handsome, stalwart young fellow stood there, suit-case in hand.

“Why, hello Mary!” cried a cheery voice. “Where are the folks—what's going on here—why wasn't I invited? Here, take my suit-case upstairs, will you? I'm going to walk in on that parlorful and give them a turn.”

As Josephine shrank back with a smothered cry, Hugh Ormesby checked himself and gazed at her, delight and surprise upon his face. Then his two hands shot out and grasped hers.

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“In the name of all that is wonderful, what is the meaning of this masquerade?”

“Don’t you know—haven’t you heard—hasn’t Helen written you?”

“Not a word! The plot thickens, what does it mean? I’m fairly bursting with curiosity.”

“Then come upstairs and hear all about it,” she said, releasing her hands, “and—and I think you’d better carry your own suit-case,” she added, with a laugh.

He laughed, too, as he caught it up and took the stairs three at a time, while Josephine followed demurely in his wake.

CHAPTER VII

A VISITOR," announced Josephine, swinging wide the door of the sitting-room, and the next moment Mrs. Ormesby was laughing and crying in the arms of her big son, while Helen was hanging to his coat-tails and patting him on the back, and doing other sisterly and effusive things. The girls fluttered to one side like a flock of blackbirds, watching the pretty scene in sympathetic silence; but Hugh's quick, sailor eyes—roving above the bronze head on his manly chest—viewed them, amusement and curiosity in his face.

"What's it all about?" he demanded, freeing himself at last, and sinking, breathless and laughing, into an armchair. "By Jove! little Mum, is this a masquerade? and what are they doing below stairs? Is it a party? For Heaven's sake, answer some of my questions or I shall burst."

"My dearest boy, if you will give me a moment to catch my breath; you completely took it away just now," said his mother. "You are looking upon our family circle. The girls are spending the winter with Helen."

"Oh, I see," with a commiserating glance at the black gowns; "all orphans, I suppose—too bad—too bad—at one fell swoop."

There was a ripple of laughter, headed by Helen herself.

"You silly boy, we're just in special uniform for to-

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night; Father is giving a dinner to the Directors, and we've been waiting on the table."

"What a nuisance! Why didn't he go to Terry's, as usual?"

"Because he can get better at home, and better service, too, and we liked it," asserted Helen.

"A pretty way of entertaining your guests, I must say!"

"But we're not guests," said Ruth, from the corner. "This is all in the day's work— isn't it, Helen?"

"Oh, the 'Seven' are always equal to emergencies," declared the President. "This was an emergency, and we came to the rescue, that's all."

"I confess I'm as much in the dark as ever, and oh—so hungry! Won't somebody feed me? When you spoke of a dinner-party just now I had an odd sinking feeling, and the sight of that table up here is the last straw."

"The girls broke ranks and flew about, clearing a space for him, while Mrs. Ormesby drew up the most comfortable chair invitingly to the head of the table.

"We shall now prepare to kill the fatted calf," announced Helen. "Father's menu was an elaborate one—will you have it all?"

"Don't skip a course, my good girl; I'm still floundering in the sea of mystery; no matter, only tell Ann to be merciful and bountiful; but stay—is Ann still in the kitchen, or is there another bevy of goddesses down below?"

"No, there are only seven of us," said Sylvia, "and unlike Wordsworth's immortal 'Seven,' we're all here." She was setting a place for him, as she spoke, in a capable sort of way, with hands that had lost much of their clumsiness, for they moved about the silver and

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glass with a deftness quite surprising. Ruth and Helen had vanished on their hospitable errand, the twins were clearing away the remains of their own feast, Edith was straightening the rather disordered sitting-room, while Mrs. Ormesby could only sit and smile across at her big boy, with a heart too full for words. Josephine had forgotten to put away her violin; she sat with it across her knee, absently picking at the strings, while she listened to the hearty tones of the young sailor.

"We got into the Navy Yard just before dark," he was saying, "and we are going to be here a whole month or more for repairs. Won't we have a jolly time?" He addressed all the girls impartially, for the "Seven" had spent many happy days in his company, when vacation had brought them down from College and Helen's handsome brother chanced to be in port. "I might as well tell you," he said, "that we're to celebrate Thanksgiving by a dance at the Yard. The committee on arrangements was bewailing the dearth of girls, and when I tell them that I can hand in seven at once they'll fall upon my neck."

Ruth and Helen reappeared, followed by Mary, all laden with good cheer, and the unexpected visitor fell to, with an appetite which awed and astonished the spectators. When the first edge had been taken off, however, he turned inquiring eyes upon his sister.

"Out with it, Helen; what mad prank are you up to now?"

"If it was a mad prank, I wouldn't be up to it," declared Helen with spirit. "We're all a very sane and sensible lot, and we're studying practical housekeeping for the eternal comfort of mankind."

"Hear, hear!" cried Hugh, rapping vigorously on the table, "this certainly *does* sound interesting—go

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on," and while he devoured the rest of his meal Helen poured into his attentive ears the whole history of the enterprise. It was a simple little account and very modestly told, for the girls were but beginners as yet. Hugh looked grave as Helen touched as lightly as she could upon the reason for the experiment, but he brightened up as the girls began to chime in, at moments peculiarly interesting to themselves, and he beamed upon the company in general when the tale was done.

"You're all a set of bricks," he said approvingly, "but you don't confine yourselves to housework and mending and cooking, do you? Isn't there some time for play?"

"Plenty of it, but we're just beginning to find it out, it all looked so big and mountainous at first," said Edith. "I'm trying to systematize things, to get in a little charity work. I go to see the crippled children and read to them once a week."

"And the other day we nearly got in the papers," added Alice. "Edith gave 'first aid' right on Broadway; a small boy was thrown from one of those big trucks where he had been stealing a ride, and he landed so suddenly in front of an automobile that the chauffeur had no time to slow up. It was an awful moment. Edith and I stood paralyzed. We were crossing the street when it happened, but fortunately the car wasn't speeding; the front wheel just grazed the boy's shoulder. Down swooped Edith, like an eagle on her prey—she always goes about with her little bandages, and her little scissors, and her little plasters, and her little salves—and before I knew it she was sitting in the car with the boy's head on her knees and his jacket open, feeling for dislocation, with that surgical look on her face you know."

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"Why, when did this happen?" interrupted Helen.

"Day before yesterday. It was a regular adventure, but we decided there was too much business on hand to tell you all about it then, so we bottled it up."

"And there's a most interesting sequel," added Edith.

"We haven't reached that yet," said Alice mischievously. "Before I could prevent it, there was Edith snipping away at bandages and straps, quite unconscious that the lady sitting beside her was the owner of the car, and very interested in the operation, but I was standing with the growing crowd on the curb, and *I* saw her—and who do you think it was, girls! Why, our dear, dearest Miss Burne-Elliott, of all people, and Edith didn't even look at her!"

"And you never told us!" exclaimed Sylvia and Ruth in chorus.

"Perhaps it was just as well," said Helen; "we would have been too excited over it, and we certainly were too busy."

"I didn't know you knew Miss Burne-Elliott," said Mrs. Ormesby, much interested; "where did you meet her?"

"They gave an open-air performance of 'As You Like It,' summer before last, during Commencement week, and she made a simply wonderful *Rosalind*," explained Helen. "Then afterward, we girls had her to tea, and we all fell in love with her. Last year she came and gave us several interesting talks—I certainly wrote you about it, Mummie—for the Club just took her in, she was such a girl herself and seemed to enjoy our fun; but then I wrote whole volumes, and you're excused if you don't remember everything. Go on, Alice; what did she say and how did she look?"

"As lovely as ever," said Alice, answering the last

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question first, "and when I called out, 'Oh, Miss Burne-Elliot!' and clasped my hands, Edith just dropped her scissors and stared into Miss Burne-Elliot's laughing face. Everybody knows who Miss Burne-Elliot is, so everybody pressed closer, and I was beginning to feel so conspicuous when Miss Burne-Elliot said, 'Suppose you come with us, Miss Alice (think of her remembering my name), the boy is not much hurt, but we can take him home and talk on the way.' Then we found out where the little chap lived, and away we sped."

"And you never said a word! I couldn't have kept it in," said Sylvia, shaking her head.

"It was nearly out two or three times, but I smothered Alice's babbling inclination with a sofa pillow," said Edith mildly.

Hugh could not help laughing as he looked at the fair, ethereal face of the last speaker, so utterly at variance with her high-handed methods.

"Now, *I'm* going to tell you the cream of it all," she continued. "Of course, Miss Burne-Elliot asked about each one of us, and when I told her what we were doing this winter she was wild with enthusiasm. 'I wish I could help you girls in some way,' she said. 'I'd love to join in the fun,' and then I thought of our tableaux for the orphans, and—I—I—" Edith paused becomingly.

"She positively had the affrontery to ask Miss Burne-Elliot if she'd help us out," broke in Alice. "I thought I'd die of shame, girls; you don't know her—behind that Madonna mask lurks the soul of a conspirator."

"What did Miss Burne-Elliot say?" demanded Helen.

"Say! Why, she just snapped it up. She offered

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to manage the whole affair for us, and as a grand finale she promised us the balcony scene from 'Romeo and Juliet,' if we'd find her a Romeo."

Helen gave an ecstatic, half-smothered shriek, which Ruth promptly suppressed, for in their excitement the girls had quite forgotten the company below.

"Mummie, you can double up on the price of your tickets, and have your house crammed to the doors. Ye gods—what luck! Tune up a jig, you dreamer, I feel like dancing."

"Hold hard, my lassie, what is this I hear about tableaux—and where do I come in?" asked Hugh, making a long arm and catching his sister as she pirouetted by.

She perched on the arm of his chair. "Is there a Romeo on board your ship?" she asked.

"There's a fellow named Langley—John Langley—a middy, who spouts Shakespere by the bucketful; we have him up sometimes to entertain us. You might put him on a tunic and curl his locks. I want to dress up, too, and do things," he wound up so plaintively that Helen patted him on the head.

"Your wish shall be gratified even to the full measure of your desires," and she was better than her word.

Hugh's coming made a great difference in the household. He had two weeks' leave, which he spent at home, and while he laughed and joked with the girls about their new occupations, he was sober enough when he talked things over with his father and mother.

"It wasn't fair to have kept me in the dark," he said one morning when he found himself alone with them in the library.

"My dear fellow, we were expecting you home each day," said his father; "besides, it was hard to put the

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whole thing on paper, when, as you see, a few words of explanation sets the case before you."

"But Helen is getting all the laurels, and there's as yet no wreath on *my* brow."

"You *shall* have a wreath, my son," promised his mother, smiling.

"At least I can do without the very liberal allowance you send me every quarter, Father. Most of the fellows have nothing but their pay, and they manage to make themselves pretty comfortable," Hugh insisted, bent on sacrifice.

"No, I won't do that; but since I am running the whole house on half rates, I'll reduce your income in the same way for a year, until things straighten out a bit, will that do?"

"For the present—yes; but I feel a drone in this hive of busy bees. Isn't there something else I can do?"

"Why don't you consult Helen? This is her morning for the accounts, she is probably busy with Fred Gayle. It's Saturday, you know, and he turns in the Farm cash."

"The Farm!" echoed Hugh.

"Why, yes, the little witch is really making it pay; what we have wasted heretofore goes to feed the hungry rich, who give fancy prices. But go upstairs and see her, she has curtained off a bit of the hall for her working den."

"And who's Fred Gayle?"

"A young College student in whom we have all been much interested; though little more than a boy himself, he has an orphan niece and nephew whom he is bringing up, and who are in a measure dependent upon him. Helen has found him invaluable."

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"I'll go up and have a peep at him," and Hugh was as good as his word. The coast was clear, for Saturday was a busy day among the "Seven."

In vain he had listened for the strains of Josephine's violin; that young person was doing the marketing. Ruth and Elsie were helping Ann with the luncheon. Sylvia and Edith were in the laundry with Bridget, who, having more leisure on that day, gave interesting lessons in clear-starching. Alice was closeted with the family mending, and only the hum of Helen's voice floated down to him as he mounted the stairs, supplemented occasionally by a pleasant, jovial laugh. As he reached the top, the curtains of the little Sanctum parted, and Helen herself, followed by Fred in teamster garb, met him in the hall. Helen laughed triumphantly.

"There, you see, Fred, you couldn't escape. Hugh is a dreadful prowler, and convention is nothing to him. This is Mr. Gayle, Hugh, my very good friend and right-hand man. He and Jerry are running the Farm for me, you know, and I'm coining money."

"It is all Miss Helen's head, I assure you," interposed Fred. "Jerry and I are just satellites."

"Mercy, mine's all theory, they do the practical part," insisted Helen.

Hugh laughed. "I suppose there are faults on both sides, but I wish some of you busy ones would give me a job; you can't tell what I feel like in this beehive."

"I thought Daddy was going to take you down town."

"I don't want to go down town—you are very little inspiration, Helen; perhaps Mr. Gayle will take charge of me."

Fred hesitated. "I only stopped for a moment on my rounds to tell Miss Helen about the new chickens;

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my truck is full of orders, which I have to deliver before noon, after that—”

“Oh—I say—take me along—I’ll be as good as gold—and won’t even eat an apple—and I know the wagon will be full of them. Let me drive and you deliver, it’s the best way in the world to become acquainted, and will keep me out of mischief besides.”

“For Heaven’s sake, take him! He’s a perfect land-lubber! And come back to luncheon,” said Helen.

“I can’t, my Saturday afternoons belong to the kids, you know.”

“Bring them along; your afternoon can begin from here as well as from home.”

“Thank you; Kitty and Will will be in the seventh heaven of delight. I’ll be glad to have your brother,” with twinkling eyes, “but with those immaculate clothes—”

“Oh, I can change in a moment, there are some old left-over togs hanging in my closet,” and, delighted as a boy, Hugh cleared another flight of stairs in true sailor fashion. In a few moments he reappeared, looking very much like the overgrown schoolboy Helen had remembered in the days before Annapolis, even to the small button of a cap perched on the back of his curly head. The old gray jacket was a little tight over his broad chest, and the trousers just a little bit off in length, but the result was all that could be desired, and the two young men, starting out in so friendly a fashion, were sure to find their morning full of interest.

“The truck is at the basement door, the side gate, you know,” explained Fred. “Our way lies by the kitchen—have you pockets in those old clothes? Ann and her assistants usually pay tribute as I pass through.”

“This was a boy’s suit,” said Hugh. “I think it

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boasts of sixteen pockets—nice, bulging ones, too. I had a trick of always standing with my hands in my pockets, which enlarged them considerably, to say nothing of the tops and an occasional green apple which roosted there. Hello! Ann, the top o' the mornin' ter ye!"

Ann's broad back was turned toward them, but she wheeled at sound of Hugh's voice. "Lord love us!" she said; "it's your room to your company this mornin', Master Hugh. I'm thinkin' me an' the young ladies is too busy for jokin'."

Ruth looked up from the pie she was trimming with dexterous hands, and smiled brightly at the newcomers over her glasses.

"We're not joking, Ann, we're hungry; at least, we're going to be hungry when we get through."

"Mr. Fred never asks for things," said Ann severely. "Miss Elsie, darlin', is that pan of cookies browned yet? You might give 'em a couple apiece."

"They only make a couple of mouthfuls," said the irrepressible Hugh. "Miss Elsie, double the rations; Ann has a good heart."

"Oh, go 'long wid you! Miss Ruth, me dear, where did we lave them sandwiches? I always manage to have a snack ready for our driver of a Saturday."

"It's hardly fair to take them to-day, Ann, I'm coming back to luncheon. Still, they look so tempting," Fred added, as Ruth tied them neatly in waxed paper.

"Master Hugh'll eat what you can't," said Ann with conviction, "if the ocean hasn't took away his appetite. Now, then, shoo! I can't have yez clutterin' up my kitchen and spilin' my young ladies for work. Look at Miss Ruth, now, she's clean forgot that pie since you come in."

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Ruth flushed scarlet—her color came and went very quickly; she caught up the pie and proceeded to whack at it with anything but professional skill, while Elsie indulged in a very audible titter from her corner. The invaders prepared to retreat, having secured their cookies and a rosy-cheeked apple apiece. Fred lingered a moment.

“How does the novel come on?” he asked.

Ruth looked at him severely, though her lips twitched. “Can one keep one’s mind on novels and—and pies at the same time?”

“Well, no; but I thought you had a special time appointed for your literary efforts.”

“I have; I’m taking a course in human nature.”

“Good! Will you join the youngsters in their walk to-day? They count on having you.”

“Thank the youngsters heartily, but I shall have to decline. We are due at Miss Burne-Elliott’s for tea at five, to settle about the tableaux.”

“It doesn’t take all seven to do that.”

“One of our rules,” said Ruth, still more severely, “is never to shirk a duty; it will take all seven and perhaps as many more before we have quite arranged things—good morning!” She dropped him a little curtsey of dismissal, though her eyes were dancing with fun, and Ann applauded vigorously when his back was turned.

“That’s the way to treat ’em, Miss Ruth, rale stern-like, when they gets to hangin’ round the kitchen. Men folks and cookin’ don’t go hand in hand; many a good dish has been sp’iled by ’em, I know it to my sorrow. You can’t begin too early to train ’em—not but what they ain’t useful sometimes,” she added grudgingly, remembering with royal condescension several favors conferred

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upon her by John in his leisure moments, and by Fred in his various pilgrimages to and from the Farm.

"Where I live, we find them very useful," said Ruth soberly. "My father owns a large ranch, and we need good riders, you know."

"That's the place for 'em, not round a kitchen stove."

"Yet there was once a great king who baked cakes," began Elsie.

"Don't you believe her, Ann; he let them burn to a crisp, and he got a good scolding for his pains, for all he was King Alfred the Great. He wasn't a patch on me when it comes to cooking—look at that pie!" and Ruth took it out of the oven, done to a turn.

The children, rosy-cheeked and bursting with spirits, arrived promptly in time for luncheon, accompanied by the prince.

"Uncle Fred telephoned," said Kitty. "It was dear of you to ask us, Miss Helen. We tried to leave the Prince with Nora, but it wouldn't work."

"He doesn't like the Irish," added Will. "Nora and he bark at each other from morning till night. I've tried to explain to the Prince that it isn't very gentlemanly to act that way, and he sits up in front of me, with his head cocked, and one long ear drooping, and looks at me with his soft brown eyes, as if he understood every word I said."

"And then the minute Will lets him loose, he runs to the kitchen, and snaps and barks at poor Nora's shins," wound up Kitty.

"Then he won't like Ann, she's very Irish. How does he do as parlor company?"

"First rate!" declared Will, "and at luncheon he'll

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go right under the table and won't stir until we're through."

"How about the tableaux?" asked Kitty, removing with some care the "best hat," which Fred insisted should replace the Tam O'Shanter on their Saturday trips.

"We're going to see Miss Burne-Elliott this afternoon. We have very little time for preparation."

"Remember, we're to be in it," said Will.

"Certainly, we couldn't do without you; that is well understood."

"I'm just crazy to see your big brother," said Kitty. "Is the naval uniform very handsome?"

"I'm afraid you'll be dreadfully disappointed," laughed Helen. "Hugh never wears his uniform at home. You'll see him at luncheon."

"I wonder—" Kitty stopped short and grew visibly embarrassed.

"Out with it, Kit," demanded Sylvia, who found the children great fun.

"I wonder if he'd give me a brass button—I'm dying for a brass button. Evelina Smith has six—all different sizes, and she wears them on a black velvet collar; all the girls in my class do now—at least all who can get the real thing. Of course, the bought ones are very nice, but they are not—are not—well, celebrated, you see. These buttons must have been used by a true and true soldier or sailor—to count, and if I could get a start, you know—"

"I never saw any one like Kitty for asking for things," said Will in a tone of contempt. "A brass button! why don't you ask him for a quarter right out? That's what they cost—at least—maybe more."

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"I don't think one or two even would break him," insisted Helen, scenting brimstone in the air.

"Well, I dare you to, anyhow," and Will, sticking his hands in his pockets, turned on his heel. Kitty's dander rose and her eyes flashed.

"A dare never stumped me yet, Will Grey, it won't now. Before I finish I expect to beat even Evelina's collar—I'm going to have seven on mine—see if I don't!"

What more Will would have replied is unwritten history, for luncheon was announced, and the waiting party broke ranks and filed into the dining-room, at the same time the two young men, who had been refreshing in Hugh's room, made their appearance, followed by Ruth and Elsie, for the girls had learned to make such rapid changes of toilet that none but the initiated could have guessed who among the seven were responsible for the dainty touches to the meal.

Hugh met the children in his hearty way. "I suppose these are the 'kids' Uncle Fred talks so much about; no one prepared me for the size of them. That chap, now, will soon be training for Annapolis—wouldn't he look well in brass buttons?"

There was a momentous silence, during which Kitty choked over a slice of bread and butter and grew the color of a peony. Will fixed his round eyes upon her. Here was her opportunity, and it was slipping; she tried to say something but her voice failed. Then Helen came to the rescue.

"How funny that you happened to speak of brass buttons, Hugh; we were just discussing them before luncheon, and wondering—"

"If you had any old ones," blurted Kitty, "the older,

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the better, and if you owned one flattened by a bullet, I'd be so much obliged—”

“I don't happen to have one exactly that pattern,” said Hugh; “we haven't had any wars lately, you see, but,” a bright idea occurring to him, “you could hammer it quite flat, you know, a hammer would do just as well as a bullet for that purpose.”

“Kit's a beggar, but she's honest,” said Will. “If she can't have the real thing she won't take the imitation, I heard her say so.”

“Suppose we go down to the ship this afternoon and see how many we can collect,” suggested Hugh. “I'm a lazy loafer and these girls don't want me, and there's no telling how many buttons one can find on a big ship—probably enough to make you a girdle, Miss Kitty.”

Kitty bounded ecstatically in her chair. To show the girls at school a *box full*—enough to make a girdle—was beyond her wildest dreams. She would be a marked person—certainly the most popular in her class. She glared triumphantly at Will, but he only turned his interested gaze on Hugh, and began to fire nautical questions at him until he cried for mercy.

“No wonder your poor Uncle Fred looks old and worn,” he declared, “if this is the way you treat him.”

“I've drawn the line at three questions a day, and have thus saved my reason,” said Fred. “But seriously, if you don't mind the trouble, a visit to your ship solves our afternoon problem. We usually waste half an hour deciding where to go.”

“And the Prince,” said Kitty, while the thumping of a tail under the table told that his Royal Highness was interested in his own problem.

“We have to cross the Park,” said Helen, “and might just as well leave him at your apartment.”

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"Unfortunately, the maid is out."

"But there's the elevator man," put in Will. "He and the Prince are great friends, and the Prince doesn't care how many times he whizzes up and down."

So it was settled, and the talk drifted from the youngsters, who, being unobserved, made the very most of this bountiful opportunity, until Fred arrested the sixth muffin from Will's grasping hands and set the marmalade jar beyond Kitty's reach.

The girls talked very little in public about their plans for the tableaux. It was one of the rules of the "Seven" never to boast of what might be done, for fear of possible failure. The committee on arrangements had been perfectly delighted over Mrs. Ormesby's offer of her beautiful home for the entertainment, and also over her assuming responsibility for the entertainment itself; it took a great deal of detail out of their hands, and was better in many ways than a liberal donation of money.

The "Seven" did much discussing in their own rooms, in the quiet interval of tea and fudge, which they allowed themselves each day, but even Mrs. Ormesby knew little of what went on behind the closed doors. When Miss Burne-Elliot's timely offer of help came to them, their ideas had been somewhat chaotic, but it was with hearts beating high with hope that the procession of seven wended its way across the Park, sedately accompanied by the Prince.

The day was clear and crisp, with a foretaste of winter. The late fall had left a glory of bronze and copper, and even red among the foliage, and the girls' cheeks, aglow with health, turned ruddy with the exercise, so that by the time they had left his Highness with his friend, the elevator man, their spirits had risen to the occasion.

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When they reached the big building where Miss Burne-Elliot lived, Sylvia and the twins balked.

"We don't want to go in like a young ladies' Seminary," they declared. "The Chief, of course, and three of us for the first load, the others will trot around the block; we'll show up later." So when Miss Burne-Elliot trailed out into her spacious hall to meet them, she seemed surprised.

"Why, I thought there were seven of you!" she exclaimed, when the first cordial greetings were over.

Helen laughed and nodded. "There are three more of us to come up later. They objected to invading the premises in one big bunch. What a lovely place, and how well it suits you!" and Helen glanced from the high vaulted room with its gigantic window at one end, with its harmonious shades and touches, and air of living comfort, to the tall graceful woman beside her, with a face more than beautiful, in its alertness and intelligence.

"That is a very nice compliment," she said, in a voice like organ music, as Josephine afterward described it. "I am so glad you like my studio, for that is all it is. This great high ceiling is good for my work, in rehearsing for my different rôles—my voice carries to the very rafters; and look up at the balcony, see how effective it is; wait and I'll show you." She caught up a pale blue scarf, flung it around her head, and ran lightly up the toy stairway which the girls noted connected with the sleeping-rooms above. A moment later a sweet and charming *Juliet* was leaning over the balcony, and Shakespeare's immortal love scene was wafted down to them, while they stood spell-bound, forgetting even to lay aside their coats.

The bell brought their hostess downstairs again, flushed and smiling over the pleasure she had given, and

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the other girls were speedily made aware of what they had missed.

"Never mind," said Miss Burne-Elliot, "perhaps later on I may give you another bit. I have a funny little story about that balcony scene, which may possibly interest you. Last summer I was visiting a friend in a beautiful mountain country in the Adirondacks. She had a lovely home and my room faced the glorious mountain peaks, the highest in the range, they tell me. I had long French windows opening upon a little balcony, and one brilliant, dazzling morning as I stepped out upon it, to drink in the sunshine, a gentleman, a well-known actor, tramped by beneath me.

" 'Romeo, Romeo!' I called. 'Wherefore art thou, Romeo!' and would you believe it, we forgot everybody and everything but the beautiful words, and when we had finished, there stood my hostess on the large veranda beneath me, vigorously applauding.

" 'I never saw it better done!' she cried. 'Would you two try it again at sunset to-morrow, with the red touching the mountains, and the evening glamor over it?'

" 'Yes,' we said, quite unsuspecting, and the next day the narrow mountain road was lined with carriages and automobiles, the house and grounds were filled with a smiling, eager throng, and my Romeo and I spouted again, while the sun sank like a ball of fire behind the distant peaks."

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Elsie, clasping her hands. "I really believe if there is one thing I could do, it would be acting," she added modestly.

"We'll soon find what talent lies hidden among you," said Miss Burne-Elliot with a smile, and now here comes our tea. If some of you will pull out that nest of tables, my little English maid will be less awkward."

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The girls exclaimed over the beautiful inlaid tables, as they placed them hospitably around, and all enjoyed the tea and buttered muffins, while Miss Burne-Elliot kept up delightful desultory talk.

Ruth finished her muffin and leaned back with a sigh. "If the people who rave over the tones of your voice, could only hear you ask some one to have another muffin," she said, as Miss Burne-Elliot passed the plate to her, "I think they'd go wild. I don't believe they think you would descend to a buttered muffin."

Miss Burne-Elliot laughed as she helped herself. "Buttered muffins are among the mainstays of the true Britisher. Buttered muffins stimulate discussion, for we have much to talk over if I'm really to be of help to you. Now Miss Helen, what is the scheme, what is it for, and what do you hope to realize?"

She began in such a direct way that one almost forgot the great actress in the practical business woman, who was so willing to put her sensible ideas at their service. For an hour they talked and planned, and when at last Helen looked at her watch and gave the signal for going, Miss Burne-Elliot said good-by to an excited group.

"I'm sure we'll make a success of it," she said, "with a lovely home and so many willing hands."

"And such a good friend," added Helen, who could always be counted on to say the right thing.

"Of course that counts, but it's not everything, there's much hard work attached to real success you know. *Au revoir*, and remember, talk as little as possible, so that our finished work may dazzle the beholders."

So the "Seven" went home elated, to talk of Miss Burne-Elliot, and tea and buttered muffins, but never a word about the tableaux passed their discreet lips.

CHAPTER VIII

GIRLS, this afternoon, at three sharp, there's to be a dress parade in my room. It's raining too hard for us to go out, and Hugh reminded me this morning that Thanksgiving is only a week off. That means the ship's dance, and if you're all like me," added Helen, "you have nothing to wear."

An answering groan greeted these remarks.

"I have a trunk full of last year's wrecks," sighed Sylvia. "We haven't had a minute since we came here, you see, and buying was forbidden. Good old Helen, give us a dispensation, and let us buy one gown apiece, for the honor of the 'Seven'; we don't want to go in rags, you know."

The twins looked up expectantly, buying gowns was the delight of their souls, and the last two months had been severe discipline.

"I have my last year's white silk, but it's dirty. It could be cleaned, I suppose," began Edith, "and there's my white chiffon over pale blue, but the roses are all crushed beyond redemption, and the chiffon is torn and soiled."

"I've nothing but a few summer silks and my graduation gown," said Ruth. "Father gave me money for a couple of evening dresses, but we've had no time to think of those things."

"My yellow chiffon is as bad as Edith's, I had expected to go shopping, too," said Josephine.

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"And I'm the worst of the lot," declared Helen, "I don't own a dress that isn't shabby."

"Then of course we'll *have* to buy something," said Alice, in a tone of conviction. "Elsie and I are in the same boat, we have some pretty things to be made up. We can't drape them around us, you know."

But Helen laughed at such an idea. "If we haven't grit enough to surmount this difficulty without appealing to the shops, we're a pretty poor lot. Come to my room at three, with all your finery, and we'll talk it over."

"Don't have Miss Pierce, she's too practical and sordid for such a flimsy consultation," said Sylvia. "Little Rita Thornton has twice the ingenuity when you're after ideas. She may suggest something really original."

"Not a bad idea," said Helen, "and she'd like the fun. I'll ring her up right now, and Jerry can go for her this afternoon."

So it was all arranged; in response to Helen's mysteriously worded invitation, Rita found herself safely ensconced on that young lady's comfortable lounge, as the clock struck three, and simultaneously there arrived, staggering bundles of animated finery from the regions upstairs. Helen spread a sheet on the floor, and the rainbow-colored pile was banked up before the wondering Rita.

"Now then," said Helen, turning her key in the lock, "this is a secret session, for when one has a seafaring brother prowling around town, one is never safe except behind bolts and bars. Rita, you are a specialist, and we've sent for you to handle some delicate cases. Miss Pierce is very good as a general practitioner, but she's slow, and we need quick treatment. We propose to make out of that disconsolate pile—with your kind help and

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advice—seven handsome evening gowns for the ship's dance. We've only six days to fuss over it, and we really want to look our best. To us, the pile seems hopeless; not to you, perhaps."

"Far from it!" said Rita. "That's a lovely thing on top—that yellow."

"Mine," said Josephine promptly. "What shall I do to redeem it? I feel as if I were playing a game of forfeits," she added laughing.

"Try it on," commanded Rita, and Josephine obediently retired behind a screen on the other side of the room; when she emerged at last, thanks to Elsie's timely aid in "fastening up," she looked like a tall and graceful jonquil. But she was right, in the full light the dress had lost its freshness, it was absolutely soiled in many places, and Rita gazed at it thoughtfully.

"It could be cleaned," she remarked, "but you haven't time; it might be—it *could* be dyed—a little deeper yellow would hide the dirt and be equally as pretty and becoming."

"Yes, but they take quite as long to dye things as to clean them," said Josephine.

"Not *my* way, I do my own very nicely. I've done lots of it. I could do it for you; it's not much trouble—I'd be so glad to help," said Rita eagerly.

"Maybe dyeing will solve our problem," said Helen hopefully.

"It settles a great many problems," observed Edith.

"Are you referring to our future state, old croaker, or is your mind fixed frivolously on gowns?" demanded Ruth.

"I believe I was occupied exclusively with my white chiffon," Edith confessed, "though it *did* sound funny. You see it's made to wear over a pale blue silk slip, and

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could be dyed to match, couldn't it?" and fishing it out of the heap, she held it up for Rita's inspection.

"Of course, that will make it lovely, I can freshen the roses for you. Next!"

"My Commencement gown, but it's too thin for the season," said Ruth, spreading it before her. "I dished it out pretty thoroughly last summer. It seems hopeless, doesn't it? And here are a couple of summer silks—nearly gone, you see. I couldn't get a dollar at auction for the lot."

"You wouldn't want to sell these precious things. This silk mull of yours is beautiful, and the old rose summer silk will be just the thing for a slip. Miss Pierce can show you how to cut it out, and it won't take you more than a day to make."

Ruth closed her eyes and clasped her hands in mock ecstasy. "Methinks I see the picture," she murmured. "Rita, you are something more than a mere teacher of millinery; you are what an artist would call an impressionist, you have the art of presenting a masterpiece to the mind's eye, in a few swift, sure strokes. I am already gowned for the dance, the admiration and envy of all beholders."

"*We* are battered wrecks," said Elsie, as she and Alice fished up an armful of their belongings. "Our pink and blue crêpe de chînes had better go in the rag-bag. Did you ever see such bedraggled looking objects!"

"You'd better try the washtubs instead," said Rita. Crêpe de chînes wash beautifully; rip off that exquisite lace and pearl beading, and I'll have it all cleaned and ready to be put back. Those other gauzy things needn't be looked at now."

"How about this?" and Sylvia held up a woe-begone heliotrope creation of chiffon and heavy silk embroidery.

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"Red would be most effective," declared Rita, "the dyes show very rich shades."

"Rita, you're a wizard, Sylvia will look simply stunning in a red gown. As for me," added Helen, "I'll only show you one among my many forlorn hopes. After our blessed tableaux and Christmas, we'll really have to give our unbiased attention to clothing ourselves properly. I used to like this pink gauze—can I do anything with it? It's one big blotch of dirt."

"The pink under it seems fresh enough," said Rita, examining it with professional eyes. "Suppose you dye the gauze a beautiful silver green, and finish off the low neck with this wreath of rosebuds that catches the skirt."

"With Helen's bronze hair, she'll look like a picture," said Josephine. "Now, theoretically, our toilets are complete. When and where do you open your dyeing establishment, Miss Thornton?"

"Let me see—perhaps to-morrow—and here, if you like. The dyeing process is quick enough; it only takes care and energy. I'm afraid," with a little sigh, "I'm not quite strong enough to do it alone, if some of you would help—"

"We all will," declared Helen heartily, "indeed, we want to do the whole thing under your directions; now tell us what is needed," and forthwith they plunged into an animated discussion of ways and means.

The "Seven" were full of suppressed excitement that evening, but Mrs. Ormesby, being a discreet lady, asked no questions. The gay talk and laughter flew from one end of the dinner table to the other, for Hugh was entertaining three of his special cronies, two fellow lieutenants and the young "middy," John Langley, whom he had suggested as a fitting *Romeo*. The sailor boys were enjoying themselves greatly, for the girls' overflow

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of spirits poured out upon them. Hugh was delighted over the impression they made, and when they adjourned to the library for coffee, and Josephine played all their favorite airs upon her violin, their enthusiasm knew no bounds.

"Our little 'jig fiddles' will sound nothing to you ladies after Miss Ashton's music," said John Langley. "We have only a primitive sort of band—too primitive for the size of the ship—but it keeps time, and that's all we need for a dance."

"Oh, it's the glamor of the ship that will please us more than anything else. Do you give a dance in every port?" asked Sylvia.

"Generally, it's our one diversion you know; we sailors lead hard, self-sacrificing lives," said Lieutenant Ball, whose ruddy countenance and laughing eyes belied his words.

"I forgot to tell you girls," said Hugh, "that the dance is not to be on board ship, there's so little space there for such a lot of folk as we are expecting. In summer time it's another matter, when we're anchored in the river and we have the wide decks, but at the Navy Yard we generally use what is known as a 'Sail-loft.' They made sails there in the old days, now they make flags. It's nothing more nor less than a pretty big space of waxed floor, and the flags will lend 'dashes of color' to help in the decorations—we fellows always see to that."

"But I'm disappointed," pouted Sylvia, "I wanted the ship."

"You shall have it for part of the time; as President of my Ward Mess, I invite you to dine with us first—a select company."

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"Don't forget to count us in," said Mrs. Ormesby, "your father and I are just spoiling for a dance."

"You are the most necessary part of the whole," said Hugh, patting her head, as he towered beside her. "A dance without a chaperon is positively unheard of in the social annals of the Navy."

"And you're mistaken, Miss Browne, if you think there's glamor in a ship. She's all nails and screws and big guns. Something to take care of and polish up, just a huge government baby, with a nurse for every joint; we have eight hundred in crew, and not a man idle," added John Langley. "You see, being a 'middy,' I bunk in what is known as the 'steerage,' and come close to the workings."

"It's life below stairs for poor little Johnny," laughed Hugh, "unless we great ones have him up to spout Shakespere. Give us a bit now, lad," he said in an off-hand manner, prearranged with Helen, but Langley flushed to the roots of his yellow hair.

"Oh, come, Hugh, I'm not a high-school boy going round reciting things."

"Certainly not, but you might do *Hamlet* for them, or *Romeo*."

"*Hamlet's* out of the question, and as to *Romeo*—well I just won't. I wouldn't mind a bit from 'The Merchant of Venice,' there's a fine speech of *Bassanio's* in the casket scene, if I had a nice *Portia* to talk back."

"I could read the part," said Edith shyly, fastening her deep blue-eyed gaze upon him with deadly effect. Langley at once fell into the trap, and Helen breathed a sigh of relief, for Edith was a delightful reader, and in the College days had been picked out as one of the best Shakespere interpreters.

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"I propose that we adjourn to the hall," cried Hugh, "the voices carry better there," and out they all streamed, grouping themselves picturesquely in an impromptu circle about Edith and the young midshipman, who stood, one on either side of the great fireplace at the far end.

Edith looked tall and willowy, standing straight before *Bassanio*, a bit in shadow of the overhanging mantel shelf, while the firelight flickered and danced over her in bewitching little darts and gleams.

"Am I all right?" she asked, smiling, and poor *Bassanio* answered "Perfect!" in such a rapt way that there was a general laugh, and Hugh called out peremptorily:

"That's not in the dialogue; give it to us straight, Johnny, whatever you do."

Then *Portia* and *Bassanio* bent to their work, and the pretty scene went with a swing, while the delighted audience clapped and encored.

The sonorous voice of the tall young "middy" rang out in the spacious hall. Perhaps he had never spoken to so lovely a *Portia*, for there was no denying that Edith was a very fascinating young person, all the more so because of her genuine unconsciousness, which was her greatest charm. At any rate he was very modest when compliments were showered upon him.

"I should imagine you'd make a splendid *Romeo*," said Helen innocently. "Have you ever seen Miss Burne-Elliott as *Juliet*?"

"Only last year, I envied the stick of a *Romeo* who acted with her. I'm not much, but I could have done it better."

Helen laughed. "Perhaps you may have a chance some time," she said impressively.

John Langley stared at her, but she was evidently in earnest.

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"Perhaps you have some sort of a pull with the great actress," he said, laughing in his turn.

"Perhaps I have," she answered seriously. "Would you like it? To play *Romeo* to her *Juliet*, I mean."

"Like it! If it were within the limits of possibility; but you're joking."

"Wait—come with me and hear for yourself."

The telephone stood in a far corner. Helen rang up Miss Burne-Elliott's number, and gravely handed him the trumpet while she spoke into the receiver. Miss Burne-Elliott was at home, and the talk was brief but convincing.

Langley's face underwent many changes while he listened, and when Miss Burne-Elliott concluded by asking Helen to bring her newly found *Romeo* around to call, the trumpet actually fell from his nerveless hand.

"So that was Hugh's little game, was it, to have me up here on exhibition? Well, I'm glad I didn't know beforehand, I should have blundered through everything."

"That's what we thought," cried Hugh triumphantly. "Little Mum, you can sell your tickets at five dollars apiece, with such a combination. I am glad our blessed ship touched port in time. Come on, fellows, it's late and we must report at the Yard before eleven," for Hugh's leave was over and he could only come and go as a visitor.

The next few days passed in a whirl of work. Rita came early each morning, and the drying-room below was given up to the mysterious purposes of the "Seven."

"Mummie, dear, I see question marks written all over your face," said Helen, encountering her mother on the stairs, and surprising a mildly curious glance, "but we are in the midst of what you might call 'evolution' just

at the present minute. I can tell you this much, however, we are getting ready for the Navy Yard dance, and we are very busy making something out of nothing—will that content you?"

"I suppose so—is there anything I can do?"

Helen considered a minute—"Yes, if you'll ask no questions; we all want something pretty and appropriate to wear in our hair. Among us we have an overflow of ribbons and gauze and flowers and velvet, and if you don't mind, we'll dump the job on you."

"Oh, my dear!" said Mrs. Ormesby thoroughly shocked, "such slang!"

"Yes, Hugh is demoralizing, it takes me weeks to unlearn all the ship jargon, but never mind—it's most expressive."

"I haven't the faintest idea what you are going to wear," objected her mother.

"I'll bring you every color of the rainbow and you can make what you like," said Helen, "we will trust to your taste."

"But I won't know which is for which."

"Never mind, just make seven—and we'll toss up, we are pretty apt to be satisfied," and Helen departed, still veiled in mystery.

The drying-room was the scene of unflagging industry. Rita was commander-in-chief, and the girls worked under her directions. One dress at a time went through the complicated process of "dipping," and before luncheon, the beautifully tinted fabrics hung on the lines.

"The worst part is the pressing out," said Rita, "but I think the shades are lovely."

After luncheon a delegation waited on Bridget, with

a request for the use of the laundry. Bridget's good nature was not proof against their wheedling, and they had the big, convenient room to themselves for the whole afternoon.

Meanwhile the twins had made their soiled gowns ready for the wash-tubs, and Rita showed them how the delicate material could be washed without the least bit of pulling or stretching, while she herself, dipped the filmy lace in soapsuds, squeezed it out, and then patted it until nearly dry.

Ruth spent the morning in ripping up the old-rose silk; in the afternoon she consulted Miss Pierce, and before night, the slip to go under the silk mail was well on the road to completion. On the day before Thanksgiving everything was done, and the "Sevens" celebrated the occasion by drinking tea in Helen's room, with Rita as the guest of honor.

"I never thought we'd come out off this alive," said Ruth, glancing with wonder and admiration at the seven faintly gowned spread out on Helen's bed. "What looks very different from the disconsolate heap we flung on the floor a few days ago, doesn't it?"

"Now that we know a thing or two, I'm afraid no new gowns will be bought this year, with all my pile of cast-offs," said Sylvia. "I shall dye everything I own when I tire of the original hues."

"I, for one, am going to banish grim care and think only of the joys of to-morrow," said Edith. "How are we going, Helen?"

"In the most prosaic manner. If it had been summer, Jerry would simply have taken us in hammocks to the landing, and the ship's launch would have been there to carry us over. Instead, we'll all pile in the big theater carriage,

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with Mother and Daddy in the coupé. Jerry will have to drive one, and John the other ; as to poor Fred, we will relegate him to the Subway."

"How nice! I didn't know he was going," and Ruth looked up quite pleased.

"There are always a few black coats among the blue and gold lace, and Hugh has taken quite a fancy to my man of business. I only wish you were going too, Rita," she added, struck by the wistfulness in the delicate face.

But Rita smiled, and the shadow passed directly—"I never miss such things," she said quietly. "I've been very happy in helping you, and if I can see you dressed for the dance, I shall feel repaid."

"You shall, indeed, we almost feel as if you were the author of our being," declared Alice enthusiastically.

Thanksgiving Day dawned clear and cold. There was the first sharp breath of winter in the air. All day the girls were in a flutter, and the early dusk saw them tucked away in their rooms, while Rita limped from one to the other, giving finishing touches in her own deft way. At half past six, a bouquet of blooming flowers stood outside of Mrs. Ormesby's door, knocking for admittance. Phyllis was putting the last touches to her mistress's toilet, and Mrs. Ormesby, turning from her own pleasant reflection, gave a little cry of surprise as the radiant young faces gathered round her.

They were not all beautiful by any means, but they were fresh and buoyant and happy, while the consciousness that they were looking their best, and through their own efforts, but added to the pleasing effect. To be young is, after all, half the battle, so Mrs. Ormesby thought, as she listened to an animated history of their struggles, and noted the gay good humor, and the clear, honest eyes, and it was fine to see how well the "Seven"

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pulled together in every emergency ; no little jealousy had ever betrayed itself, and each was as proud of the other's appearance on this special night, as of her own.

"I'm *so* glad you like us," said Ruth, who as usual voiced the popular feeling. "There's only one drawback to the evening, I find," and a little twinkle glittered behind the eye-glasses. "Girls, we have no chaperon, look at that!" And Mrs. Ormesby flushed like the youngest of them, as the eyes of the "Seven" turned upon the girlish figure in its soft clinging gown of dull blue, above which rose a fair face with its wealth of tawny hair, so like Helen's.

"Dear little Mummie, she is glorious. I'm half afraid to trust her among so much gold lace," said Helen, hugging her on the spot.

"Ladies, the carriages are at the door," called Mr. Ormesby, "and we haven't too much time."

Then the rainbow string of girls floated away in search of cloaks and scarfs, and presently they were driving at a rattling pace through the dusky streets, already beginning to glow with electric lights.

"It's a good thing we started out with an overflow of spirits," observed Josephine, when they struck the great Bridge at last. "Brooklyn usually produces torpor—it's neither fish nor fowl."

"Tell that to the Brooklynites," laughed Sylvia, "and such a remark from a Philadelphian—the city of eternal sleep!"

"We're at least a City," remarked Josephine, with cutting sarcasm, for they were passing through the most uninteresting quarter, where all the old-fashioned, dirty-looking houses seemed to be cut out of the same pattern.

"I'm not defending it," said Helen, "but this is only the lower part—around by the docks and shipping—the

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Navy Yard naturally cannot be in the heart of town. Look way ahead, you can see the gray stone gates of the Yard, and don't expect paradise inside. I'm glad the night hides all the smudginess of the place; I've been there in the daytime—Ye gods!"

But they were agreeably surprised to see the gateway outlined with electric lights, and a long glittering row of them strung across the main walk to the edge of a little canal, where a funny looking ferry boat—run on a cable—waited to carry them to the ship.

Fascinating-looking young sentries paced up and down, guarding the entrance, and Hugh himself, with his three friends, resplendent in ceremonial trappings, beside whom Fred Gayle, in his evening black, looked like a poor shadow, stood waiting to receive the party.

The young officers wore their boat-capes, below which could be plainly seen the gold lace of their dark blue uniforms, and these capes were carelessly flung aside that the gold braid and buttons upon their manly chests could distinctly awe the beholders.

"These fellows are for use, not for ornament," said Hugh. "Langley, being only a 'middy,' isn't so furbelowed, and can take a lady upon each arm. I will escort my sister and Miss Josephine, the rest of you may have a maiden apiece. Now, little Mum, fall in with Father, and all make tracks for the ferry, the boat's coming in now. Shall we take you up the gangway or the ship's ladder? Perhaps Miss Sylvia would like the ladder, to preserve the glamor of the ship."

"I'd rather preserve the tail of my gown," called Sylvia, who found Lieutenant Blount quite worth talking to, and was chattering away as to an old friend.

"I would suggest the gangway on this cold night," said Mrs. Ormesby.

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Presently they all piled in the boat, and the little snorting thing had them across before they had time to think about it, and the huge black hulk of the ship rose out of the night, and loomed ahead of them. The cable rattled to its finishing thump, and a moment later they were all aboard the big ship, while the grinning sailor-boys touched their caps to their superior officers, and looked curiously after the girlish figures as they flitted by, carefully guided by their escorts. Helen had slipped away from Hugh, and was hanging on her father's other arm. Hugh looked after her admiringly, and turned to his companion, who seemed a little embarrassed by the arrangement.

"This suits me utterly," he said, with a happy laugh, drawing her hand more securely through his arm. "Do you know, Josephine, I have had very little time to talk to you since I came home; we used to have jolly good talks in the old days; now you are either too busy or there are too many of you. I demand three dances to-night, the first, the middle, and the last," and he handed her a dance-card. Josephine laughed and shook her head.

"I may give you the first and the last, but no more."

"The fellows upstairs in the Ward Room will be sure to gobble up everything; may I put my name down as security?"

"Yes, but seriously, one dance is all you should have, Hugh."

"For such an old friend! Nonsense, you know it is different with us. I have a profound admiration and respect for all the 'Seven,' but you and I have made mud-pies together, so to speak, and two dances are a mere pittance; besides, I'm going away soon."

"On that account it shall be *two* dances," said Josephine firmly. "Hugh, you're a great wheedler, there's

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my card," and Hugh wrote his name with a great flourish.

"I always ask for one more than I expect," he said with a chuckle, "and human nature is queer, if I had asked you for two dances, you'd have beaten me down to one—now wouldn't you?" and his laughing eyes smiled into hers. "Take care of those steps, they are so steep and narrow, it will be safer for you to go ahead."

In the Ward Room the girls found themselves surrounded by dazzling creatures in much gold lace and many brass buttons, and introductions were bewildering. There was the richly adorned Lieutenant-Commander and the ship's Surgeon, a jolly red-faced person, not forgetting the Paymaster and many Lieutenants and Ensigns, all glittering in their "best bibs and tuckers," while the Captain of Marines quite took their breath away with his splendor.

"Don't stop to identify people," said Hugh, taking his sister by the arm, "but come into my stateroom to take off your wraps. You'll have to enter in squads," he said, as he flung open the door of the tiny space, consecrated to his possessions. "Half of you at a time, please. Here, little Mum, is a chair of state; put your things on the 'bunk,' ladies, and behold where the lion is caged. I have very commodious quarters compared with some. You should see the space below, where that giraffe John Langley has to fold himself up."

The girls glanced about them, much interested; everything was nice and shipshape, the "bunk" was spotless, and a wardrobe built in the wall disposed of his belongings, besides which, there was quite an imposing desk, covered with books and writing materials, and photos of various interesting ladies, young and old, whom he had met on his travels, at which they peered curiously.

"You'll find many nationalities there, but after all I

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prefer the American type," and he pushed to the front a full length picture of his mother, while Mrs. Ormesby colored like a girl.

In the Ward Room the table was set for twenty people, and fairly glittered with the gorgeous silver service presented by the State after which the ship was christened. Mr. Ormesby and Fred Gayle had been taken in charge of by the hospitable officers, and before dinner was served the stiffness of recent introductions had quite melted away.

Thanks to the name cards at each place, each girl learned to know the officers on either side, so with every one of the five courses, the friendly and informal spirit of the occasion put everybody at ease.

Uncle Sam fed his officers well, and the emblematic turkey graced the board, with all the Thanksgiving frills attached, added to which was rice and curry—the navy specialty—and for dessert, wine jelly, or "trembling Jane" as it was called aboard ship, was served in a foamy bed of whipped cream. Over the coffee, the girls' dance cards were demanded, and would have been filled at once, but the Lieutenant-Commander intervened:

"Don't be greedy, remember the Junior Mess is coming to this dance, and we mustn't take all the plums."

He forthwith sent his orderly to give his compliments to the President of the Junior Officers' Mess, and say that the Ward Room Officers would be glad to have the Juniors join them at the sail-loft for the dance that evening. And then, after much lively chatter, there was a pleasant bustle of departure.

The building was far from handsome, but the rather stablelike entrance was festooned in flags, while along the banisters of the somewhat rickety staircase which led to the loft, gay bunting was draped with artistic

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effect. The loft itself was literally a bower of beauty; its somewhat unsightly walls were completely hidden by the drooping flags, and electric lights were strung on poles diagonally across the space. The ship's band, in their red and gold uniforms, made a bright splotch of color in one corner, and there was an expectant tuning going on among them.

The girls' cheeks began to glow, and their impatient feet tapped unconsciously on the waxed floor. The big place was gradually filling with invited guests, and before very long the dance was on, a perfect riot of light and color. The "Seven" were not still for a moment, and Mrs. Ormesby found herself borne away by one gallant officer after another, much to the amusement of her husband, who was content to stand and watch the pretty, ever-shifting scene.

"Aren't you going to dance, Daddy?" asked Helen, pausing like a bird in her gay flight, her gold-laced cavalier beside her.

"No, indeed; your mother *did* cajole me into the first dance, but I confess I've outgrown it; every muscle aches."

"Only from disuse. Look at Mummie, *she* doesn't seem stiff."

"She'll pay for it to-morrow," declared Mr. Ormesby, with gloomy foreboding. "I might have had another try at it, but I can't get back my own wife for the venture, and I won't risk another lady's neck. Stop up your ears, Helen, don't the people look like a set of marionettes, with the sound of the music shut out?"

Helen laughed as she tried the experiment. "They certainly do, you dear old misanthrope; well, you're perfectly hopeless—if that's the way you look at it, *au*

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revoir," and Helen's partner swept her again into the maze of dancers.

"I wonder what the ranchers would think of a dance like this!" and Ruth paused out of breath, while Fred Gayle vigorously mopped his heated brow.

"I always imagined cowboys were a pretty jolly set," he remarked.

"So they are, but there's no style about them; they elect to have a dance, so they clean out a barn, make barrels of lemonade, get their girls and a handy fiddler, and pitch in. The girls come in shirtwaists, the boys keep on their flannel shirts; oh, we have great times, perhaps next year you may come West for your vacation, you and the youngsters, and you'd see the genuine thing. I love my great big prairie West. I'm going to ride one of the horses father shipped to me, if I ever have time to try his mettle in the Park. Would you like to try one?"

"Wouldn't I! I lived on a horse when I was Will's size. My home was on a large farm up-state, and my big roan carried me from one end to the other."

"Then you'll enjoy my little broncos, and we'll go soon. I don't think Mrs. Ormesby would mind if you were along. John's all right and safe, but he's nothing much of a horseman, and it takes skill to manage the ranch breeds. Now I've caught my breath, let us be moving," and she too floated away on her partner's arm.

The twins had the time of their lives, the pink and blue *crêpe de chine*s were in constant demand, for they danced with the ease and grace which is born with the Southern girls. So alike were they, with their blonde hair piled high on their heads and their pretty shoulders emerging at just the same angle from the pink and blue gowns, that only the difference in the colors they wore

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could distinguish one from the other, and the unwary being to whom their names were not familiar, was apt to get into a sad muddle, if these very mischievous young persons chose to play pranks, which they did many times in the course of the evening.

Sylvia's red gown attracted much attention, and Sylvia's vivacious self attracted still more. The "Mid-dies" in particular, thronged around this birdlike young person, who had to chop her dances into little pieces to satisfy all claims. As to Edith, the acknowledged beauty of the bunch, many eyes followed the graceful, slender figure that evening, for besides mere perfect features, there was an undefinable poetic charm about the flower-like face, that drew like a magnet.

"How about the glamor of a ship's dance?" demanded Hugh, as he caught the red gown in a final "Home, Sweet Home" waltz.

"It's still there. I'd like another one to-morrow," answered Sylvia, with a sigh, as she finished the waltz and went for her wraps.

"It *is* to-morrow, and Father has just received some cabalistic signs from Jerry outside. I'm glad you've had a happy evening. Take care, you fellows!" for the young midshipmen, working off the exuberance of their average twenty years, were making tracks for the ship, after the manner of a stampede, down the shaky staircase.

"Take care!" but the warning came too late, for Helen, who with her escort, was nearly at the bottom, leaned too heavily on the swaying bannister; she lost her balance, and missed her footing on the very last step. She would have fallen had not her companion held her firmly, but she turned very pale as she clung to him, for she had given her ankle an ugly wrench.

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"What's the matter, Miss Ormesby, are you hurt?" and Lieutenant Ball looked anxiously at her.

"It's my ankle, I twisted it somehow—," she managed to say, biting her lips, as a deadly faintness came over her. "Let me sit down somewhere, please."

Instantly, a dozen men had stretched out helping hands, and the red-faced ship's surgeon came quickly forward, while Mr. and Mrs. Ormesby hurried up.

"I'm all right," murmured Helen, "don't be frightened. It's my ankle; I lost my balance somehow. Oh, I don't want to faint—it hurts so—"

"Here, take this," the Doctor pulled a little flask from his pocket and poured out a stimulating drop or two into the little cuplike cover. "Now pull off the shoe and stocking and let me see the damage."

"I'll do it," and Edith was at her friend's side. "Poor old Chief, she needs careful handling," she added, "the ankle is swollen already." She had deftly removed the slipper and stocking as she spoke, and the Doctor was making an examination.

"I don't think there are any bones broken, but a sprain like that is painful. It should be bandaged at once. Will some one get my kit of tools from the ship?"

"I'll go, sir," and Hugh rushed away, returning in a very few moments. The Doctor hunted out his bandages, and did his work so skillfully that the color came back into Helen's cheeks, and she was able to smile into the concerned faces all about her.

"Now," said the Doctor, "if some of you brawny young fellows will lift her to the carriage, I think the worst is over. A few weeks' rest at most, will put you on your feet again, Miss Ormesby."

Fred and Hugh made a sailor's chair for her, and she was very gently deposited on the long seat, her mother

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beside her, while the girls shifted about, two of them crowding into the coupé with Mr. Ormesby.

It was only when safely in bed, with the girls hovering about her, that a look of dismay crossed Helen's face.

"What are we to do!" she groaned. "How will we ever get through the tableaux!"

"Steady, Captain, we're all here," said Sylvia, "and it's only an ankle, your head-piece is all right."

"And you can boss us just as usual," added Josephine, "so don't worry."

"You've just ceased to be a walking delegate for a while, but you'll be very interesting, wait and see," prophesied Ruth. Then, at a sign from Mrs. Ormesby, they said "Good night" and trooped away, to get what sleep they could, before the day began in earnest.

CHAPTER IX

HELEN'S accident kept her in her room for several days, for it was quite impossible for her to put her foot to the ground, but she was far from lonely, and made a most interesting invalid, clad in one of her daintiest tea gowns and enthroned upon her lounge. Exquisite flowers turned the place into a veritable bower, for each member of the Ward Room Mess seemed to hold himself personally responsible for the damaged ankle, while the poor little "Middies," who broke down the stair-rail, sent a floral offering worthy of an alderman's funeral. How Helen went on when it came, and how she and the girls laughed as they concocted a composite letter of thanks, and then tore the emblematic sheaf of flowers apart, and filled every available vase and bowl with the gorgeous roses and the masses of violets.

"Now you can get some faint idea of what it will be when you die," said Ruth pleasantly, "dozens of wreaths, and pillows of white roses, and broken columns, and perhaps a lyre and a harp, and—" a plump sofa pillow, fired by Elsie, nipped the rest of this graphic description. Ruth caught this missile dexterously, and bowed politely. "Thanks for the gentle reminder, which reminds *me*. Ann sends her compliments, regrets that you were unable to assume your accustomed duties in her department this morning, and begs for the privilege of serving your luncheon in person to-day. She looked mysterious, as if she had made something especially delectable."

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"How are things going?" asked Helen anxiously.

"Everything on greased wheels," declared Sylvia. "You'd be perfectly astonished, Helen. We're beginning to fit in so nicely, that the whole house machinery seems to work itself."

"I'll be limping around soon to take a survey, and meantime, after to-day, I'll do the mending and darning. Now listen to what Miss Burne-Elliot says about the tableaux and the new *Romeo* in particular," and Helen took a thin blue envelope from the pile on the table beside her.

MY DEAR MISS HELEN:

Romeo came up yesterday, bearing your note of introduction, and while I was sorry for the accident which prevented your coming with him, I was glad to get him by himself, for after his first attempt with me, his natural shyness wore away, and with the second and third attempts, *Romeo* came out finely. I think some half-dozen rehearsals will put us quite straight. And now for your poor self; it is too bad you cannot come to me for consultation; but if you like, I will be very glad to come to you—say Thursday afternoon, and tell Miss Ruth that I trust she has taken my advice, and if so, I am most anxious to hear the result.

On Thursday, then, if I hear nothing to the contrary.

Sincerely yours,
CONSTANCE BURNE-ELLIOT.

"Ruth, what have you been doing?" and Helen laid down the note, with the air of an inquisitor, for Ruth turned the color of a peony, under the scrutiny of her comrades.

"Nothing much," she said hurriedly. "You see, the day after the dance you sent me over to explain to Miss Burne-Elliot about the accident and to ask her when it

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would be convenient to see Mr. Langley. I had to wait a few minutes, for she had gone to a large reception, and she came in perfectly disgusted with society in general and particular. She reminded me, I told her, of a stormy goddess at war with the earth. She laughed when I said that, and we fell to discussing the tableaux. Then suddenly an idea popped into my head, a writing idea, and before I knew it I had blurted it out to Miss Burne-Elliott. She said—well, never mind what she said. I've been putting it clumsily together ever since, and maybe I can get it in shape to read aloud when she comes on Thursday. That's all," and Ruth dismissed the subject with a wave of her hands.

"It's sorry I am ye're laid up, Miss Helen," and Ann's portly presence quite filled the doorway. She was carrying a large silver tray, an unusual burden for the autocrat of the kitchen, who was accustomed to bearers herself. "It's waffles I'm bringin', me own specials, an' I was thinkin' you'd like a fust hand report of the doin's below. There isn't none of 'em has your head, Miss Helen, though they *do* try, I'll say that," and Ann set the tray on the little table, and lifted the cover from the piping plate of waffles.

Helen shifted herself with some difficulty, resting the injured foot on a high stool, and greedily eyed the tempting fare.

"Best eat it while it's hot," suggested Ann. "I've left Miss Elsie and Miss Alice in charge, an' I ain't so fearful things'll go wrong. Cookin' seems born in some folks; them two has it, and why? Because they don't keep their pretty heads stuffed full of other things while they're in the kitchen. There's Miss Ruth now, good enough cook when she tries to be, beatin' up a omelette yesterday for lunching. 'Ann,' she says, 'how

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do you make ambrosia?' 'Oh, go long,' ses I, 'it's omelette ye're attendin' to now, you can't think of two things to oncet.' An' do ye think she was ashamed? Not a mite, she just laughed an' owned up she was dreamin' like. It's a livin' wonder she didn't spile that omelette; she has fool's luck about her cookin', but when her an' Miss Sylvia gits together, my land! I feel like throwin' up the sponge, as the fighters say. Then another team is Miss Josephine an' Miss Edith, they come down one night to help me with dinner, an' they'd been a-hearin' some grand music in the afternoon."

"Oh, yes! the Philharmonic Concert," said Helen, poising a delicious morsel on her fork. "Go on, Ann, what did they do?"

"Well, Miss Josephine got to talkin' about one piece they played (an' me with my chickens in the oven an' she a-bastin' of 'em) an' she takes her greasy spoon an' waves it in the air, keepin' time, an' Miss Edith, with a potato on a fork a-parin' of it, stops dead short to hum a tune; them cooks isn't born, an' it's mighty hard work makin' 'em, they're willin' enough, the dear knows, an' they take all my tongue-lashin' like you said they would, but I can't tell you half the queer things they do, you wouldn't believe it. I'd laugh sometimes if I didn't get so mad on top of it," and Ann's jolly laugh rang out now. "Tell you what it is, Miss Helen, it's fine trainin' for me, if it don't do nothin' else, it'll make me easy on the little kitchen maids when they gits fashionable again; for the life of me, I can't give my new help the Tartar sauce I used to give in the old bossy days; it don't come natural somehow."

"Yet we're learning, don't you think?" asked Helen anxiously, lingering over the last morsels of her waffle.

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"To be sure," said Ann condescendingly, "not to say," with a chuckle, "that I could give yez a recommend for a place, but yez could fill in fine if the rale cook got took off suddint."

"Good!" cried Helen, "that's what we want. I do feel that we're getting on; thanks for the treat, Ann, your waffles were good."

Ann looked at her wistfully, "I'm not sayin' it for perkin' you up, Miss Helen, but there's grand cooks wasted along of you an' them little twins. I don't think even a husband could make yez spile things," and Ann departed with the air of having conferred the Victoria Cross, while Helen had her laugh out.

Miss Burne-Elliot came promptly on Thursday afternoon. The early December snow was falling, and she shook the powdery flakes from her long fur coat as she mounted the steps of the Ormesby mansion. Josephine was on duty this afternoon, and Miss Burne-Elliot exclaimed with delight as the beautiful interior met her gaze, and she stood in the immense foyer measuring it with her critical eyes.

"I had no idea it was all so imposing and so spacious," she said. "We can build our entertainment on a larger scale than I anticipated. How is the invalid?"

"Blooming, thank you, outside of a bandaged ankle, which keeps her tied at home. To-morrow, I believe, Jerry is to carry her downstairs and she is to go driving. Will you come up? You may take the lift or try the stairs," she added smiling.

"The stairs, please, they wind so gracefully and the curve here makes a perfect balcony for *Juliet*. You see, I am eying the whole thing professionally, and I'm a close observer. Ah, this is Mrs. Ormesby!" she ex-

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claimed, as that lady met her on the broad landing. "I knew Miss Helen had no sister," she said, in her charming way which won her so many friends, "and the resemblance is so striking there could be no mistake."

She followed her hostess into Helen's pretty room, receiving an enthusiastic greeting from all the girls who were clustered there. Helen had been promoted to a chair for the occasion; there was a small table at her elbow, with a pad and pencil for memoranda, and Miss Burne-Elliott dropped into one of her graceful attitudes on the sofa.

"Shall I go away?" Mrs. Ormesby paused at the open door.

"Indeed no!" cried Helen. "You're the Chairman of the House Committee. Everything must be ratified by you before we pass a true bill. Does that sound Congressional enough?"

"You talk like a bit of red tape," said Mrs. Ormesby laughing, as she too joined the circle, "so I suppose it must be all right."

Miss Burne-Elliott was full of most original plans and suggestions, and the little pad was soon covered with all sorts of interesting notes and jottings, while the girls' brains were teeming with ideas.

After several novelties had been discussed, Miss Burne-Elliott said, with a smile and a meaning glance at Ruth:

"I'm going to propose something rather classic in outline, and if Miss Ruth has carried out a certain original idea she confided to me, I think we will have a very unique climax to our entertainment."

Ruth fidgeted and an unusual shyness came over her. "I hate to read my things," she said, "but if you *will* have it, here goes!" and she opened a thin manuscript

that she had cleverly kept hidden from view until this moment.

RECEPTION DAY AT OLYMPUS

she announced, then as the title created quite a little stir among her mates, she went on in a firmer voice:

Jove nodded; there was nothing so remarkable in that—he had often nodded before; but this time Juno looked at her lord and master suspiciously out of the tail of her eye, for she herself was fearfully bored. The reception had been a tedious one, an endless procession of family connections, an aimless exchange of meaningless Olympian civilities, a constant fear of some family quarrel breaking out among the assembled guests. She had been under a great strain, and just when she felt that she might safely relax a little, she had suddenly discovered that Jove was nodding—indeed, the august eyes were closed, and the majestic head swayed gently under the spell of Morpheus, who, as Juno knew, was hidden somewhere in the motley gathering.

“Jupiter, my dear,” she whispered, administering a conjugal pinch, “you really *must* rouse yourself; our guests are beginning to go, I’m glad to say, for I’m perfectly exhausted. This sitting in royal state is no fun; all the interest seems centered in that punch-bowl in the cloud-room. Bacchus made the brew, and he’s getting dreadfully drunk. I’m surprised at Hebe; she and Ganymede have passed around the cup until there won’t be a steady head in Olympus. I’ll give them both a piece of my mind to-morrow.”

Jove opened his eyes and stretched himself sleepily: “I wish this confounded thing was over—what’s the good, anyhow! You meet everybody at receptions that you don’t care to see anywhere else.”

“Oh, one must be in the swim,” said Juno.

“Leave that to Neptune,” Jove was inclined to be

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facetious. "Look at him now, sporting around as if he didn't have a care in the world. Seriously, my dear, if you insist upon giving receptions, try to entertain your guests, then you won't be bored yourself."

"I quite agree with you, Father," said a woman's voice at his shoulder, and Minerva appeared, leaning wearily upon her shield. "I'm tired to death; I'd rather be in forty pitched battles than listen another hour to all that silly chatter," and she pointed with her spear toward the cloud-room. "Diana is serving ambrosia at one of the tables, and Venus is pouring nectar at the other. Something ought to be done to Venus—she makes me furious—there she sits in open flirtation with Mars, right under Vulcan's nose; if I was her husband—"

"Hush, child, hush!" said Jupiter. "They must amuse themselves at this deadly function—what else can one do?"

"Hebe and Ganymede seem to be having the time of their lives," pursued Minerva, "and that horrid little Cupid is the greatest nuisance I ever saw—treading on people's toes—shooting off his arrows—and getting in everyone's way."

"How are things going in there?" asked Mrs. Juno anxiously.

"Fast enough; they've just sent out Mercury for more grape-juice; that's all people want at receptions. Smile upon them, shake hands with them, and pass them on to be fed."

"Why don't you make them do things?" suggested Jove. "Apollo plays remarkably well, and some of the nymphs have good voices, and the muses could all take a turn at something."

Juno tossed her head impatiently. "Indeed, no; I've been to too many of those stupid things. Ceres gave one last week, and recited a harvest poem of her own making. Look at her over there, Minerva; isn't she a frump? Think of yellow for her complexion—and did you ever see such draperies—so bunchy and clumsy—so—so much of them, in fact?"

"It is better to err on the safe side," observed Mi-

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nerva, severely, gazing with disapproving blue eyes at some of the guests.

Jove put up his hand to hide a smile; his clever daughter amused him greatly. By this time the company began to stream from the cloud-room toward their host and hostess.

"Such a charming afternoon, dear Juno," said Venus airily. "Cupid tells me my sea-shell and dolphins are at the door. I won't wait for Vulcan, he's too heavy for my light equipage. Good-by, good-by, Minerva."

That grave lady turned away abruptly as Apollo and his sister paused for their adieus.

"We are *so* sorry to leave so early," began Diana; "but Apollo is due at a concert, and he wouldn't go without me—*so* glad we came—good-by."

Jove was growing restless with the vanishing of the guests. Of all the gay throng, only Pluto and his fair wife, Proserpine, and Neptune and *his* wife, Amphitrite, remained for a few last words with their brother and the fair Juno, and their favorite niece, Minerva.

Jove was tired and cross, and Juno's temper was decidedly sour. "Don't talk to me about receptions!" cried Jove. "Of all the inane, stupid, god-forsaken things—"

"Hold, hold!" said Neptune. "Don't commit yourself, brother; *my* reception takes place before another moon."

"Where, where?" asked Jove, running his hands through his long wavy hair.

"In my new palace—it will be a brilliant function."

"And *my* reception comes right after," said Pluto. "Proserpine always likes a welcome from her friends, when she comes on her yearly visit."

Jove and Juno looked at each other with blank, despairing faces, until Minerva stooped and whispered to her father. Jove leaned back and laughed until the heavens shook. Then he jumped up and grasped his brothers' hands.

"All right, old fellows," he said, "Juno and I will come with pleasure. You've chosen the most appropriate spots in which to hold such carnivals—at the bot-

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tom of the sea, and in the realm of Hades—bravo! My spouse and I accept upon the spot.”

Again Jove leaned back, his thundering voice pealing forth in merriment, and this time Juno joined in the laugh.

There was a round of very genuine applause as Ruth ended her little paper, and Miss Burne-Elliot's musical laughter was good to hear.

“Wise old Jupiter!” she said, “I echo his sentiments; his definition of a reception, as a function at which you meet everybody you don't want to see elsewhere, is delicious.”

“Ruth was just a trifle too refined in one sentence,” said Sylvia critically. “Speaking of all people want at receptions, she suggests ‘smile upon them, shake hands with them, and pass them on to be fed;’ my brother Jack told me the other day that among his own particular cronies, the watchwords at a reception were ‘gabble, gobble, and git.’”

This sally produced such a gale of laughter that Helen had to rap for order.

“What struck me,” said Miss Burne-Elliot, “was the classical tone of the whole thing and the pretty pictures we could make by doing the little skit in pantomime.”

“But would our acting explain things enough?” asked Helen anxiously, “Ruth's sentences are so clever it's a pity to lose them.”

“We won't; some one behind the scenes shall read the piece as an accompaniment to the acting, and with practice the two will go very well together. There are, of course, several pauses the reader will have to make, in order to give the pantomime more scope; for instance, when the guests begin to take leave, there must be quite a long stop until in reality all the guests file out, and this

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will make a most effective scene. What you girls have to do, is to review your Mythology, and study old pictures for the costumes, select your caste for the principal parts, and leave a wide margin for the chorus of guests. Now I think we are fairly well equipped for an excellent program, Mrs. Ormesby. Of course Miss Josephine's violin will do duty in the interludes, and perhaps we may count on one song from Miss Helen. I've never heard her, she is so modest."

"No one will care much for anything save the grand finale," said Helen, "I'm putting the balcony scene last on the program, to hold the people in their seats, Miss Burne-Elliott." But nevertheless, Helen flushed with pleasure. She loved to sing, and in these busy days of adjustment and planning, she had given very little time to the really beautiful voice; now she would have to practice, a treat she had often denied herself of late, and her troublesome ankle, which deprived her of the active exercise in which the "Seven" indulged would give her ample time for preparation.

The meeting broke up in a jolly little tea, and when Miss Burne-Elliott finally left, it was decided that the entertainment should take place some evening of the week preceding Christmas, as the great actress would be off duty and could all the better devote her time to it.

Then began a busy period for the "Seven," and each girl, at Helen's suggestion, adopted a little private schedule system, in order that the daily routine work might not be interfered with by the pressure of coming events.

Hugh and his mates took unflagging interest in all the preparations, and Fred dug among the very archives of Columbia for old prints and copies of famous pictures which might help them in their costumes. Kitty and Will were wild with excitement, for they had been

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chosen unanimously for the parts of *Hebe* and *Ganymede* in Ruth's pantomime, and were constantly posing and practicing in the privacy of their small apartment. Even Rita had not been forgotten, for Ruth had asked her to be the reader of her little Olympian Comedy.

"Oh, I—I couldn't!" cried Rita, flushing painfully.

"And why not?" demanded Ruth, "your voice is clear, and with Miss Burne-Elliott to train you, what more could we want!"

"Besides," added Helen slyly, "there'll be a chance to loosen your hair from its moorings. Mr. Trent told me it was a rippling mass of gold."

"Yes, Philip says that, like Samson, all my strength lies in my hair. I'm afraid he's right, yet I should hate to part with it; but I won't be seen, of course."

"I'm not so sure," said Ruth, her head on one side, "the classic garments would be very becoming, we could have you perched high like a Vestal Virgin, in one corner of the stage, curtained off from the main scene, and you could read the manuscript as if it was a scroll, just like the draped figure we see representing history; she always has a scroll in her hands, you know."

They were holding their millinery class in Helen's room, as the ankle was still too stiff to permit her to go up and down stairs, and it was really wonderful to see the strides the girls had made in a few short weeks. Those among the "Seven" who took to it naturally, were fast becoming experts, while the others had learned to follow where their clever little teacher led them.

Rita took great pride in her pupils, with the result that not only did the girls supply themselves with pretty and becoming hats for every occasion, but Rita found her own hands full in off hours, for Mrs. Ormesby soon

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interested her friends, by exhibiting her own dainty head-gear, and orders came fast from many quarters.

Of course on this special afternoon, the one topic was the approaching entertainment, and when the lesson was over, Helen decided that her airing should be across the Park with Rita. Mrs. Trent had offered to lend them a great old-fashioned, heavily gilded picture frame, for the tableaux had resolved themselves into a series of living ancestral portraits, and this frame, which had once held a priceless "old Master" was exactly what they wanted.

"I'll try the fit of it," said Helen, "and if I feel that I can adjust my blessed Dame Prudence to such a setting, I'll get Fred to cart it home for us in the big wagon, next Saturday."

"I'm glad you are coming over," said Rita, when John had carefully closed the carriage door, "it may be that I am a bit nervous, but Mrs. Trent doesn't seem very well; not that she complains, but she has looked so frail and shadowy of late, that I felt that Philip ought to know, so I wrote him last week."

"Have you heard from him?" asked Helen.

"Not directly, but Mrs. Trent received a letter from him this morning, which amounts to the same thing. He wrote that he is very tired, as the College work this first term has been strenuous, and he has obtained a leave of absence for a couple of months, as he needs resting and coddling."

"How nice of him! Then his mother will have no suspicion that he is coming home entirely on her account."

"None in the least, she is just anxious about *him*, and full of plans for his coming; he told her to expect him at any time, and I think she looks better already. I'm so glad I wrote," added Rita simply.

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"So am I," said Helen quickly, and then the two girls fell silent, while the carriage rattled over the frozen pavement, and from the shadow of her corner, little Rita glanced at her companion.

It might have been only her fancy, but she thought she saw an eager light in the brown eyes, and a smile playing about the corners of her mouth, and she wondered and smiled too in sympathy, for Rita, from her secluded niche, looked out upon a world which she found full of poetry and romance, and built her little castles in the air quite "unbeknownst." She never dwelt in them herself, they were always for others, poor little lame Rita! But she took great delight in looking through the windows.

"Are you sure you are able to come upstairs?" asked Rita as the carriage drew up before the door.

Helen turned and laid her hand on the small one grasping the crutch: "You do it all the time," she said gently. "I only have a stiff ankle, and John can help me quite nicely to the elevator; after that there will be no trouble, I'll soon be able to discard even this thin cane."

In answer to their ring, the girls could hear a quick step from within, and the next moment a tall young man had flung open the door, and stood on the threshold with outstretched hands and a look of pleasure in the keen dark eyes.

"Philip!" cried Rita, turning quite pale with excitement.

"Yes, I came just after you left, and Mother and I have been gossiping ever since. When the bell rang Mother exclaimed: 'There's Rita!' but I didn't expect this double surprise. Don't stand on the weak ankle, Miss Helen; you see I know all about it, but come in and solve the mystery of this vast picture frame. It used to

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hang in our library in the old days, the residence of an old Rembrandt, which went with many other treasures when the time came. The dealer didn't want the frame it seems. Let me help you—" and Helen was glad to lean on his arm as he guided her down the hall, for she, too, owned to a moment's excitement, and the ankle turned "wobbly" almost against her will.

"I know your Mother is delighted to have you home," she said, for the sake of saying something, for the dark eyes were bent upon her in the most disconcerting way.

"Yes," he answered quietly, "she *is* glad; she needs me. You will see why," and he pulled aside the portière for her to enter the quaint, old-fashioned parlor.

Helen was indeed startled at the change in the beautiful, delicate face, as Mrs. Trent came forward to meet her. She could not tell exactly what it was, only the eyes were bigger than when she saw them last, and there were heavy, dark shadows beneath them, as if from sleeplessness, but the smile was as sweet as ever, and she was much concerned over the lame ankle.

"Draw up that big chair, Philip, and do sit down, my dear. I have the frame all ready, you see. I'd love to look at some of the portraits that are to smile within it."

"Perhaps you will come and see for yourself," said Helen. "We thought at first of Marie Antoinette and her Court, the beautiful powdered ladies make very effective pictures, but Miss Burne-Elliott thought simpler subjects would be better. All of us have ancestors, and we are all raking up old portraits and mementoes—oh, you'll see."

"No, I fear not; the lights and the crowd will not be good for me, but I have some rare bits of lace and old brocades—even the regulation red velvet curtain for a background."

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"Perhaps we will borrow Mr. Trent too," said Helen, "another man is much needed in our ranks, and while he is not exactly an antique, we might make a classic study out of him. Hugh and I, of course, will pose as the old Cavalier and his Puritan wife; Josephine comes of Quaker stock, and so it goes. The girls have been haunting the libraries and looking up their genealogies; the twins have written home for pictures of their great grandmother, who was a dark-eyed Southern beauty, and we are busy with our fingers doing all sorts of things to make the entertainment a success, with as little outlay as possible. Oh, I'm becoming a great financier; you wouldn't recognize me," she laughed, turning to Philip.

"You always had a head for mathematics," he said smiling.

"Well, I seem to be extracting the square root of things at every turn," she answered merrily. "Now let me get within the compass of that wonderful old frame, and you shall judge the effect."

"Wait, don't move," cried Philip, "I'll bring it over. Your pose is so fine just where you are."

The assistance of the trim maid was called, and together they lifted the frame, which was quite large enough to embrace the girlish figure, armchair and all, while Mrs. Trent and Rita stood off to get a broader view of the picture.

"Do I look like an oil painting?" asked Helen.

"Wonderfully so, the flesh tints are quite natural," said Rita.

"And with all the accessories, and the glamor of stage setting, it will be almost lifelike," added Philip encouragingly.

"Then I'm sure the others will be satisfied. Mrs. Trent, I hate to run away, but until my ankle is all right

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I'm on a sort of probation, and must report at home promptly."

"Never mind, my dear, perhaps while Philip is with me, you may be able to run over for an afternoon. As it is, I cannot let you drive over alone, when my great boy would be glad to see you safely across the Park."

"But John and Jerry are quite enough protection," objected Helen.

"Still it will be a pleasure for me," said Philip simply, and he had his way, for a few moments later they were rolling along the Park Drive, and chatting as freely as they used to do in the old College days. He was deeply interested in the newly found work of the "Seven," and Helen talked unrestrainedly of their hopes and plans, for there was something about this grave young fellow that inspired confidence.

"And you," she asked, "isn't there some professorship looming up for you somewhere?"

"Not in the College at present, and I try not to look beyond just now. I am worried about my mother; that is why I am here, you know."

"Yes, Rita told me," said Helen gently. "I am so sorry."

"There seems to be nothing the matter, but a general weakness, and her heart I think, and we are so alone in the world, she and I," he broke off and covered his face with his hand for a moment.

"You must not think of such things now," said Helen with a tremor in her voice, "only remember what a pleasure it is for her to have you now."

"Yes, I know, I feel that, but I've seen the Doctor, and he tells me that I shall not have her long."

The sudden tears filled Helen's eyes, and she reached out her hand. He took it in both of his and held it fast.

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"Your sympathy is very sweet to me, how sweet you can never know," he said, then he released her hand and talked of other things. "You've told me all about your schemes," he began, "and I get a general idea of how it will benefit the 'Seven,' but is it a saving to your father in his present business crisis, and can you make ends meet? That is the point."

"You forget, or probably I didn't tell you, that the girls are paying large fees for their tuition in Domestic Economy," answered Helen, "and I'll tell you a secret, that only Fred Gayle knows."

"Who's Fred Gayle?" demanded the instructor of mathematics sternly.

"My man of business at present," she said gravely, though her eyes gleamed with mischief. "He and Jerry and I have been working our Farm, and the secret is, that not only has it paid for itself and curtailed our own expenses, but profits are coming in, and I have several hundreds already in bank, untouched, against a rainy day. It's great fun and no one knows it but Fred, for my idea is to spring it upon Daddy when we migrate to the Farm, that we won't need his help at all, during the summer. There are opportunities up in the hills that we don't get here, you know, and possibilities in the 'Seven' even *you* wouldn't suspect."

"I daresay," he admitted, smiling at her enthusiasm. "And the music?"

"Josephine keeps her violin busy, but I've had to push my singing into the background lately. The night of the tableaux, I may come out of my shell for a little. I half promised Miss Burne-Elliot. Now here we are, and if you'll be so good as to haul me up our short flight of steps, Jerry will take you across again, for the stables are on the other side, and your house is just on his way."

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She clung to his arm as he helped her carefully out of the carriage, for the ankle still pained her at unexpected times, and the instructor of mathematics lost his coolness for a brief moment as she looked up at him.

"Good-by," he said abruptly, holding out his hand at the top of the steps.

"Good-by," she answered wondering, "but you will come soon again—"

"As soon as I may, to hear you sing."

"To-morrow, any day, I always like to sing for you," she answered heartily.

Then he ran down to the carriage, while Mary helped her into the house.

CHAPTER X

THE City was a big sheet of snow on the night of the Orphans' entertainment, and as the first scurrying flakes came after the day's traffic had ceased, it lay in all its unsullied beauty, save where the car-tracks and the ruts made by carriages and automobiles showed dark against the feathery whiteness. There was an odd kind of hush in the air that snow always brings, and even the clanging car-bells and the tooting signals of the motors sounded muffled.

But around the Ormesby home there was no such stillness. Carriage after carriage rolled up to the door, depositing gay loads, and John and Jerry, off duty for the night, stood with umbrellas ready to shield the guests from the gusts of snow that blew upon them as they touched the pavement.

Lights glowed behind every filmy curtain in the big house, but one was hardly prepared for the vision of spring that met the gaze as the great doors swung open. The entire lower floor was a wonderland of apple blossoms and wistaria, of snowdrops and yellow jasmine, mingled with the pale green of the young leaves. Involuntarily people began to sniff the air for the faint, sweet odor these flowers suggested, so natural were they, so redolent of the season. Some even ventured to bury their noses among the blossoms, only to draw back sheepishly, rubbing the aforesaid members with furtive hands, for the flowers were made of tissue paper.

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"Our latest achievement," explained Sylvia to her mother and father, as she piloted them to a seat in the great *foyer*, just in front of *Juliet's* balcony. "There's a big concern here that makes nothing but paper novelties. Fred Gayle came across it way down town, during one of his Saturday afternoon tramps with the children. Kitty went mad over it, and teased Fred until he let her take some lessons in flower-making; so when we were at our wits' end about decorations, Miss Kitty came to the rescue and taught us all she knew. Then we swooped down upon the fascinating place and bought materials enough to go into business, and here we are," and Sylvia whisked away, for she had no time for conversation even with interested relatives.

Will was doorkeeper for the occasion, and Kitty, at a little table in one corner, took charge of the tickets; indeed the demand for them had been so great that the supply had given out, and a hastily fitted pasteboard box had served that young woman as a treasury to hold admission fees. She had, besides, a calmly commanding way of poking a program at each unoffending person and demanding a quarter.

"Well, I must say you have cheek," said Will, in one of the short pauses between the arrivals, as he saw her sweep four silver coins into the gaping jaws of the "treasury," "one program would have done for that family."

"We are not here to practice economy," said Kitty with withering scorn. "I'm going to take in all I can rake in. Of course," airily, "a mere boy couldn't do it, boys lack what Uncle Fred calls 'savory fare;' besides, people wouldn't give as easily to boys as to girls."

"We're not such beggars, that's why," fired Will, but Kitty only looked at him with a derisive smile as she scooped in two more quarters from new arrivals.

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The "Seven" had been busy among their friends, with the result that some pretty girls had been added to their force. Hugh's ship had supplied several gallant youths; Sylvia succeeded in coaxing her two big brothers to help them out; and to cap the climax, Ruth's little family, who happened to be in town for the holidays, were showing up in full force on this special evening. Her young cowboy brother Allen, somewhat subdued by his first year at an Eastern College, had been pressed into service for the pantomime, and the ranks of the Olympian deities had been pretty well filled by enthusiastic volunteers.

It was an easy thing for the Ashtons to run over from Philadelphia, and of course Edith's father and aunt were sure to be on hand; but every one felt rather sorry for Alice and Elsie, whose only brother was traveling abroad, and whose Southern home was almost too far away to secure interested relatives at a moment's notice.

One morning, however, they received a telegram from their father, which ran as follows: "Have sent you a large package, care of Mr. Morris—Merry Christmas," and they were wild with excitement. Mr. Morris was the proprietor of the hotel where their father usually stopped when he came to New York, and they lost no time in telephoning him.

"Yes," answered Mr. Morris's clerk, "a package has come; shall I send it up, or wouldn't it be better if you young ladies came down. It would save time, perhaps."

So down they went, in a flutter, to be met in the vestibule of the hotel by Mr. Morris himself, who, with a mysterious smile, led them into one of the waiting-rooms, where they literally fell upon their pretty mother.

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"It was a sudden notion of your father's," she explained. "I was just homesick for a glimpse of my girls, and he thought this might cure me, so here I am."

And there she was, in the midst of the gay crowd, looking like a girl herself, and enjoying all the excitement and bustle of the occasion.

It is impossible to describe the brilliance of the scene, before the curtain was rung up. It was one dazzling mass of color and animation. Girls in delicate evening gowns, matrons in stately velvets and satins, naval officers with a profusion of gold lace and brass buttons, a sober sprinkling of masculine blackbirds, a promiscuous scattering of younger boys and girls, and gay talk and laughter floating through the place.

The dark curtain was hung between the two stately pillars at the far end of the hall, embracing the beautiful curve of the landing, where *Juliet* was to look down into the eyes of her *Romeo*, and there was the usual hush of expectancy when it was drawn apart by Kitty and Will on either side, while some unseen hand secured it from behind. Josephine and her violin opened the entertainment, and the girl—in her simple white gown—made an attractive and appealing picture. She forgot herself and all about her as her bow touched the strings, or she held it poised, listening for the notes of Mrs. Ormesby's delicate accompaniment, for she had been prevailed upon to lend this much of active service to the occasion. More than one heart melted as the tender strains reached them, and Hugh, behind the scenes, gaily garbed as his Cavalier ancestor, pulled his hat over his face, so that the drooping plumes quite hid it, and furtively wiped his eyes when his emotions overcame him.

The Ancestral Portraits were a great success. The frame was mounted on an easel, so concealed by heavy

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draperies of red velvet that the portrait might seem to be hung against a velvet wall. Miss Burne-Elliot volunteered to introduce each portrait with a short biographical sketch, and there was quite a flutter of excitement as she came gracefully forward, pointer in hand.

"The Head of the House of Ormesby" naturally came first, and those who knew the portrait were surprised at the accurate details which had not been forgotten in Hugh's costume.

Helen, as Dame Prudence, wore the historic garnet upon her Puritan bosom, and the others were all admirable as portraits, while Miss Burne-Elliot's running comments kept the audience in a ripple of laughter.

The lights, for which Fred Gayle was responsible, were so admirably arranged that each living picture seemed to glow in its setting, and the girls, in their quaint costumes, were very charming, while the men, in their wigs and knee breeches, were no less effective.

Will and Kitty were so fascinated over the portrait idea that Miss Burne-Elliot suggested that they might pose for the only fanciful subjects in the collection, so Kitty made a most bewitching *Dolly Varden*, while Will, who insisted that the Prince must appear, was allowed to represent one of the famous Van Dyck pictures, of a boy and a dog. He looked very effective in his velvet suit, with his blonde wig curling on his shoulders, and his broad lace collar and cuffs, while one hand rested lightly on the setter's curly head. The Prince had been thoroughly drilled for this most striking picture, but the brilliant lights and the sea of faces in front of him had not originally been part of his program, and, after the first breathless moment, he rose up on his indignant legs and barked at the intruders. This quite upset the grav-

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ity of his Van Dyck master, and the curtain was hastily dropped.

The portraits had been an excellent interlude for the pantomime, and by the time Will's little sensation had subsided, Olympus had been swept and garnished for its reception, and under Miss Burne-Elliot's careful supervision the scene was a picture.

To the right of the stage in a curtained recess, yet quite visible, resting on what seemed to be a rocky eminence, sat Rita, her golden hair shimmering over her white robes, her hands gracefully holding the scroll. On the other side of her rose the Olympian throne, on which sat Hugh and Helen, as the reigning god and goddess. Edith Carlyle, whose blue eyes entitled her to the part of *Minerva*, stood nearby leaning on her shield. A curtain at the far corner was supposed to shut off the Cloud-room, and through this the guests were to approach the royal pair. *Jove* looked really magnificent in his curling leonine wig and his classic draperies, and *Juno's* bronze head with its golden crown rose proudly from her white neck and shoulders.

Rita read the text delightfully and the pantomime went smoothly to its finish, for the gods and goddesses were better on the stage than in the mythologies, and received great applause, as they wandered one by one from the Cloud-room. They had all been well trained by Miss Burne-Elliot, and chimed in with the reading, in a way quite wonderful to the audience.

Ruth would modestly have withdrawn from the caste, but no one would hear of this, so she contented herself with mingling among the Muses. Elsie and Sylvia, as *Venus* and *Diana*, dispensed nectar and ambrosia from the Cloud-room. Josephine made a stately *Ceres*, in spite of her "frumpy" draperies, and Alice looked a

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charming *Proserpine*, as, leaning on the arm of *Pluto*, she swept her classic curtsey before the Olympian throne.

Fred Gayle, as *Bacchus*, kept *Ganymede* and *Hebe* busy passing little glass punch-cups of his beverage among the guests. Allen Edgerton was *Mercury*, while one of the young lieutenants posed as *Apollo*. They tried to press Philip Trent into service, but he laughingly shook his head.

"I'm a perfect duffer at such things," he declared, "and would spoil the whole picture with my awkwardness. Let me help behind the scenes, please, and enjoy it all from the front."

So he became Miss Burne-Elliott's "right-hand" man, and made himself a patient groom to the fuming gods in the dressing-room, who found that short tunics and classic folds of drapery, and wreaths and crowns and helmets upon their shorn locks, were most embarrassing and disconcerting articles of dress. Then he came around among the spectators and applauded the really beautiful picture as it passed to the stately measure of Rita's reading.

He slipped into a shadowy corner when the pageant was over, for Helen's songs were next on the program, and he wanted to enjoy them. He wanted to feast his eyes upon the face of the girl, who, in some indefinable way, had come to occupy so much of his thoughts; he wanted to revel unmolested in the pure melody of her rich voice, and he was not surprised that Shakespeare's little lyrics should have been the selection.

"Who is Sylvia" rang out beautifully to Mrs. Ormesby's accompaniment and Josephine's obligato, and "Hark, Hark, the Lark," was a serenade worth listening to. Helen's voice came as a revelation to most of her

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friends. The applause was really so deafening when she finished that it almost frightened her, so she fled to her own room, to bury her burning face for a moment among the pillows on her bed. Here Ruth found her, and no amount of coaxing could get her back for an encore.

"Don't you want to hear all the splendid things they are saying about you, you silly old Chief?" said Ruth, giving her a little shake.

"No, I don't—at least not now," declared Helen, sitting up on her bed, and straightening a disarranged lock or so.

"Why, old Mr. Marvin said—and he knows—that you have concert work ahead of you."

"Pshaw! that's partiality; he used to take me for Sunday walks when I was a dot of a girl."

"And Madame Jéteau—"

"Nonsense! she scents a new pupil."

"You may be right," said Ruth ruminatively, "for methinks her very words bespoke as much. 'Oh, mon Dieu!' she cried, rolling her eyes, 'the privilege it would be,' then I rushed behind the scenes, to find Miss Burne-Elliot one wild bundle of enthusiasm, and as for Mr. Trent—"

"What did he say?" asked Helen eagerly.

Ruth gave one of her keen, quick looks over her glasses.

"Nothing at all—which, in the study of mathematics, might be denoted by x , the unknown quantity, though it might stand for *expression*," she added wickedly.

Helen rose up and shook her.

"Don't be foolish, but tell me if they're ready for the balcony scene. I want to slip in when the lights are low."

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"Come behind first, and see *Juliet*, she looks lovely, and *Romeo*, in a blonde and curled wig, is superb."

"No," said Helen, scenting an ambush, "go on; I'll come later."

And presently, when she deemed the coast clear and slipped down the stairs, she found Philip Trent waiting at the foot.

"My word, the first of all," he said quietly, as he drew her hand through his arm. "No singing stirs me like yours."

"Surely you have heard but little," she answered, trying to speak lightly.

"No, I have heard a great deal—and greater voices—but none so sweet—in my ears," and there was something in his low tone that sent Helen's blood dancing in her cheeks. She was glad that the darkness covered her momentary confusion, and she could slip, unnoticed, into the seat he had saved for her.

Then the curtain was raised for the last time, and the audience listened spellbound to the oft-told tale. The exquisite art of the great actress was surely at its best, and John Langley, inspired by the thrill of passion in the wonderful voice, surprised even his intimates.

"I didn't know it was in you, Johnny," said Hugh, at the close of the performance, while the big house resounded with the bustle and confusion of the departing audience.

"I didn't know it myself," said young Langley, mopping his heated brow. "It's Miss Burne-Elliot—she could train an ape, I believe."

"Don't believe him," said Miss Burne-Elliot, "she wouldn't. Such a *Romeo* is wasted in the Navy."

"Unfortunately, my country calls me," said John

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Langley, flushing to his very wig over the hearty compliment.

Altogether, the entertainment was an unparalleled success, and when the last guests had departed the actors and patrons of the performance sat down to a delicious "cold bite," which the "Seven" had prepared in off moments, and Mrs. Ormesby made a little speech to all who had so generously helped her.

"I feel more than satisfied," she concluded, "and to Miss Burne-Elliot I think a special vote of thanks might be extended."

But that gracious lady brushed it all aside. "If you only knew," she said, "what a delight the whole thing has been to me, you would never mention gratitude again. It was like renewing my girlhood in watching and helping these girls. We actresses, who really love our profession, sacrifice much on its altar; this little experience has been an oasis in the desert of much hard work. It is I who should give thanks—and now to bed, good people; if some one will kindly rouse my slumbering chauffeur, I'll take him home."

So the "party" broke up with the departure of Miss Burne-Elliot, accompanied by Hugh and John Langley, until finally only the "Seven" and Mr. and Mrs. Ormesby were left in the big echoing *foyer*.

"I feel like one who treads alone
Some banquet hall deserted,"

quoted Mr. Ormesby, striding about extinguishing superfluous lights.

"I feel sleepy," announced Helen; "who seconds the motion?"

It was carried with one voice, and before another

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hour had passed the last light had blinked through the curtained windows, and the big house merged into the shadows of the night, while the snow fell softly outside, and the tired girls slept quietly within.

To Helen, it seemed as though her head scarcely touched the pillow before a persistent tapping at her door succeeded in rousing her. She sat up in bed with a start and answered, "Come in," before her eyes were well opened. It was Phyllis, and her face was full of concern.

"Ann sent me, Miss Helen. She's sick; she says will you please take charge, and she's very sorry."

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Helen, now thoroughly roused, as, springing up, she threw on a warm dressing-gown and thrust her feet into her slippers.

"It's her throat that hurts, and she's hot with fever; she tossed and tumbled all night, but she wouldn't let me call any one."

"Wait, I'll see," and Helen ran swiftly upstairs and entered the room where the genius of the kitchen lay prone. "This is too bad," she began, but Ann waved her off.

"Don't ye come anigh me, Miss Helen; there ain't no tellin' what nonsense I'll be up to, but ye'd best not risk it. Just you go downstairs an' stir around in the kitchen a bit for the breakfast—and don't burn nothin'—an' if your Ma could send me a doctor-man to tell me what's wrong—I'd rest aisy," and Ann groaned as she turned her face to the wall.

On her way downstairs to her mother Helen roused her mates. "Extra hands on deck to-day—Ann's sick," she called as she peeped into the three rooms in turn. Then, as they all bounced from their pillows like a set of vigilant fire-horses, Helen sped to her mother's room.

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"Mummie," she called as she opened the door, "do you think you could wake up for a moment?"

"I don't know," came a sleepy voice from within. "If it's very important I might try."

"It is—Ann's sick—shall I ring for Dr. McKee?"

"Dear me!" and there was consternation in the now thoroughly roused tones. "Yes, telephone at once. I'll go right up to Ann myself," and Mrs. Ormesby lost no time in seeing the sufferer, while Helen summoned the Doctor and rushed through her morning toilet. She limped a little, for the ankle was still weak, but she had discarded the cane, and had resumed her active duties, as one might see by the capable air with which she entered Ann's deserted kitchen.

The girls descended in a body, and the Chief gave instructions as she went along. Sylvia, Edith, and Josephine were detailed for upstairs work. The twins and Ruth turned in with her, and even before the usual time breakfast was ready to be served.

The twins were really remarkable. The white, dimpled hands made the most wonderful dough, that turned into flaky, feathery biscuits; there was absolute poetry in the turn of their rounded arms as they beat eggs. They lost their languorous Southern air, and bustled like any New England housewives. Helen gazed at them in admiration, while Ruth—who was not a cook—shook her head incredulously over the dishpan, where she was presiding.

"I really believe you two like to do these stunts," she said.

"Of course; our grandmother Ogilvie compiled the best cook-book in the State. It naturally runs in the family," explained Elsie. "Alice and I used to toddle out into our great old-fashioned kitchen, with our toy

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rolling-pins and bits of boards, when we were not more than three. When we were five, Mother gave us a cooking-stove, and our cook, old Aunt Cindy, taught us a good deal; but we love it besides, you see, which is more than half the battle."

"It's the whole fight," said Ruth. "*I* don't love it, and I spoil things."

"I believe the Chief and Elsie and I could run this department," declared Alice arrogantly.

"I believe that's what we'll have to do," said Helen. "It's pretty certain that Ann won't be fit for many days, and that's the way we'll have to spend our holiday week, I very much fear."

And Helen was right; the doctor pronounced Ann's case an aggravated attack of tonsillitis, and suggested her removal to a nearby hospital for a week of careful nursing.

"Not that she would not have the best attention here," he said, "but these attacks are apt to become epidemic in a household, unless we root out the first sign."

"Sure, I'm only glad it isn't the scarlet fever," said Ann, between her groans; "but I don't want to go in one of them Mary Anns, an' be shoved in on a plank," she said, beseechingly, to her mistress.

Mrs. Ormesby laughed. "If you mean the ambulance, of course not; I'll take you myself. I'll make Jerry bring the coupé, and he can help you downstairs."

"Indade, an' I'll walk down meself, ma'am; I ain't goin' to be no dead weight for any man to carry at my time o' life," said Ann, in a tone which convulsed her hearers, and so in a few hours the removal was accomplished. Ann's quarters were put in quarantine for a day of disinfection, and the "Seven" fell to work in

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good earnest to supply what Hugh jocularly called the "backbone of the House of Ormesby."

Meanwhile, the days were not without the merry-making of the holiday season. It was typical Christmas weather, for the snow, instead of turning into slush, hardened in the biting air. Hugh and his mates, whose sailing was set for the first of the year, made the most of their opportunities, and many a happy skating party found its way to Vancortlandt or the Park.

Helen's weak ankle kept her from her favorite pastime, and though the girls, in turn, most unselfishly offered to stay away from this entrancing sport, just to bear her company, she would not listen to such a thing.

"A pretty state of affairs!" she said. "You all seem to think I'm such a baby I can't reason about it. I insist upon your enjoying this fine ice; we don't often have it out of doors, a thaw may set in any day and spoil it, and the rinks are not half so good nor so healthy. I have plenty to do to keep me from fretting. There's an hour's practicing, and a few gifts to finish up, to say nothing of Ann's legacy of work in the kitchen, so I think I can live through it," she finished with a laugh. But, nevertheless, she felt a little bereft and forlorn as she watched them depart each crisp, fine day, and the work dragged just a little, for Helen was a wonderful skater, and loved to show her prowess. The healthful exercise suited her vigorous young body, and in her trim brown suit, with a sealskin jacket and a little fur cap set jauntily on the bronze head, her eyes bright and dancing, her cheeks glowing, Helen was a picture not easily forgotten.

"Dreaming, dear?" Mrs. Ormesby came up quietly behind her, as she stood at the window gazing wistfully out, long after her mates had departed.

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"No, only moping, Mummie. I'm a pig—I wanted to go dreadfully to-day—Mr. Trent was most beseeching—he is a splendid skater and it was a terrible temptation, but I sent him along with the others, though I don't believe it would have hurt my ankle one little bit, and this was the only day he could go; his mother insisted, so Rita stayed with her, while he went more to please her than for any other reason."

"Unselfish young man!" murmured Mrs. Ormesby.

"Wasn't he! He even wanted to stay behind with me, but I just wouldn't hear of his missing this glorious day."

"Unselfish girl! Perhaps he'd rather have stayed with you," suggested her mother.

"No, I think not, but he was just crazy for me to go, we skate so well together; we used to go whenever the College pond was frozen, and we used to have such good times."

"He seems to be a very nice, capable sort of fellow," observed Mrs. Ormesby. "A pity he should be tied to teaching all his life."

"I don't think it's what he would have chosen, but it was the first thing that offered after his father's failure. I should imagine that an active business life would suit him better; he'd make a splendid accountant or something of that sort—there goes the bell. I'm maid-of-all-work this afternoon—the others are busy—I'll answer it."

She exclaimed in surprise as she opened the door, for Philip Trent stood on the threshold, his skates under his arm, and a somewhat sheepish expression upon his pleasant countenance.

"I backed out at the last moment," he said, as Mrs. Ormesby, too, came from the drawing-room to meet



“And so they went off like a pair of happy children.”

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him. "Half the pleasure was spoiled without Miss Helen's company, and I really feel that I should not leave my mother for so long. She is very feeble now and needs me every moment. I was wondering if the lame ankle could stand the short walk across the Park, with much resting by the wayside; if so, we could walk over and have a surprise party."

"How do *you* feel about it, Helen?" asked Mrs. Ormesby.

"For practical, every day purposes, I think it's quite well," said Helen, "and I'd love to go."

"Then hurry and change your dress, I think Mr. Trent and I can entertain each other until you come back. I'm rather glad that you returned," she added, as Helen vanished. "I was beginning to think my girl was having just a trifle too much work and too little play. She will enjoy her afternoon, I am sure."

"I could not have enjoyed mine without her," he answered earnestly, adding, in a lighter tone, "she skates so beautifully that the others seem clumsy and heavy compared with her."

Mrs. Ormesby gave him a quick, comprehensive glance; her mother's intuition was keenly alive to the change in the young man's voice.

"I'm glad you two are such good friends," she said cordially. "I can always trust Helen to choose well, and her friends are mine."

"Thank you," he said gratefully. "I shall need my friends, I fear, for my mother fails every day; it is hard to stand by and feel one's helplessness."

"Poor boy!" she said softly, while her eyes filled, "we will do what we can." The face she turned to him was beautiful with the sympathy which illumined it, and the hand she laid upon his arm was very comforting.

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Then Helen came back to them ready for her walk, and armed with some interesting bundles.

"Just some cakes and things for the tea-party," she said. "Good-by, Mummie; send the twins below when they come home—they can take hold and start things. Now, Mr. Trent, if you'll carry one of these bundles—I can manage with the other—take care—it's fudge—we always have fudge at tea-time."

And so they went off like a pair of happy children, while Mrs. Ormesby watched them from the parlor window.

"How fast she's growing up!" she said to herself; "soon she will be a woman," then she smiled and sighed, for instinctively she knew that womanhood was there, and that life and love were waiting.

CHAPTER XI

IT was Christmas morning, and the holiday mood shone in the faces of the girls who had assembled around the breakfast table. The room was in the most delightful disarray; every available article of furniture, except the chairs on which they sat, bore some festive mark, either of tissue-paper with freshly broken Christmas tags, or bits of holly, or bows of red ribbon, while the bell rang so often that Phyllis was forced to mount guard in the hall and take in the interesting-looking bundles literally by the armful.

In the matter of Christmas gifts, the "Seven" had been most circumspect. They accepted from one another only what their clever fingers made, and Rita's ingenuity helped them out considerably. Mr. and Mrs. Ormesby also flatly refused anything not of home manufacture, and it was really surprising to see the wonderful results, for the dining-table fairly groaned with the beautiful and useful offerings.

"Which only goes to prove," said Sylvia, "how much needless money is spent at Christmas time. I've had twice the fun in getting up my Christmas gifts this year, on a skimpy allowance, and to feel that there's something in my pocketbook besides the aching void which usually resides there after the holidays—well, it's heavenly!"

"And wasn't the Chief stern!" said Edith. "You'd hardly think, Mr. Ormesby, what flinty substance is

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hidden behind that bland and smiling exterior. Each of us retired to meditate for one hour, during which time we were to prepare a list of the people we wished to remember, and some shadowy hint of the presents we would like to give, also an approximate idea of what we wanted to spend."

"I literally tore my hair," said Ruth; "that was the worst hour I ever spent in my life."

"Well, now, *I* wasn't particularly happy, either," said Helen; "I had a dreadful time. If I do give medicine, you can't say I don't take a big dose myself."

"Anyway, we all came like little whipped dogs to the Chief," went on Edith, "presented our lists and received our orders, and woe betide the unlucky person who stepped beyond the limit!"

"And we weren't allowed to apply to any of our natural protectors, either," said Elsie. "Here was our dear little mother on the spot, with an open check-book, but Helen was obdurate."

"The hardest problem was the Christmas cards," said Josephine, "but Sylvia suddenly remembered her water colors, and I wish you could have seen the dainty things she did for us. Indeed, I never knew we were such a pack of geniuses before."

"Oh, discipline is a great thing," said Helen; "none of you had to withstand the temptation that came to me. Daddy called me into his den about two weeks ago—"

"Now, Helen," said Mr. Ormesby, shaking his finger at her.

"No matter, it would leak out somehow. He wanted to give me my usual check, and when I refused it, he was so rampant that I had to fly for my life, and all the time I was aching for it. There were so many things it could have bought. I'm glad I didn't now, with such

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a deluge as we're getting from outside," and she bent over a box of American Beauty roses which Fred Gayle had just sent to the Club.

There was a ten-pound box of candy from Hugh and his mates, with an enigmatical note from Hugh himself:

We're coming up some time during the day—a good half-dozen—but don't prepare for us, we'll take "pot luck" if we can't get anything else. Hurrah for Santa Claus!

HUGH.

Helen looked aghast. "What on earth shall we do?" she asked in despair. "Here we were just congratulating ourselves that there was no need to bother with a Christmas spread—with Ann away—and Hugh does this ridiculous thing."

"Take him at his word," suggested Mrs. Ormesby, "don't bother your heads. I've even written Aunt Henrietta that, contrary to our usual custom, we could not have her to dine with us to-day."

"What!" exclaimed Helen, "you dared Aunt Henrietta?"

"Certainly; you know she has frowned systematically on this year's experiment, and while, had Ann been here, I would have been glad to show your prowess, I was not going to have you hampered by her disapproving glances."

"Aunt Henrietta is a character, girls," explained Helen; "she is the last scion of the Darcys, and if you ever saw a typical old maid, you will recognize the pattern. I suppose that once she must have been young, but even Mother can't remember when. She always comes out to the Farm for a month, so you'll have am-

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ple opportunity to study her angles, and particularly and above all, she objects to the modern 'young girls'; she says they are too broad-shouldered and mannish. I wonder what she'll say to seven of us in a bunch, Mummie. At least her remarks will be interesting."

"Eminently so, but one always has to take Aunt Henrietta with a pinch of salt. Now, what shall we do about Hugh and his friends?"

"I don't know exactly," said Helen; "you see, we'll be such a small family for dinner, and we're going right afterward to the kiddies' tree. If they could come in during the evening it would be nicer for everybody."

"Why not send him a message?" said Josephine solicitously; "we wouldn't like to miss him."

Helen's forehead took a little pucker of perplexity. "There is no way of reaching him on the telephone; a telegram, I suppose, would be the surest way of warding him off."

"Poor boy! I hope he won't go hungry," and Mrs. Ormesby's motherly conscience got ahead of her.

Helen laughed. "Our 'poor boy' never went hungry in his life. He won't now, never fear. Yes, a telegram will be best, and now to work—this room is a perfect muddle."

"You'd better appoint a committee to attend to the flowers and candy alone," said Ruth.

"No, each man for himself; we'll just pile our belongings in our own rooms," said Helen, energetically loading up.

"Don't forget those white roses," and Edith pointed to an open box, with Philip Trent's card lying conspicuously on the top.

"Of course not," replied Helen serenely. "Mummie, if you'll just wade through this sea of tissue-paper

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and smooth it out, and roll up the bolts of Christmas ribbon, I think you will be well employed until we meet again. Come on, girls, we have no time to lose," and the "Seven" staggered away, each with her arms full of gifts, their tongues wagging merrily, and their happy laughter echoing through the place.

Mrs. Ormesby glanced across at her husband, with a sympathetic smile on her own face.

"Well, Will, what do you think of the first quarter of the experiment? It's three months since the girls took hold, you know."

Mr. Ormesby looked up from the book of exquisite views that Helen had mounted for him. "As far as we can see, it goes well," he said guardedly; "I'd rather withhold my opinion for another three months."

"Why, please?"

"Because, while there has been plenty of work, there has also been a fair share of play. Wait till the frolics are over—when the sailor-boys sail away—and things begin to settle down into the humdrum of daily routine, that's the time to find out the stuff these girls are made of. Perhaps I'll give them a real problem to tackle after the holidays."

"What do you mean, dear? Is anything wrong?"

"No; but in floating such a gigantic scheme as ours, the directors have to be very careful, and more retrenchment may be necessary."

Mrs. Ormesby looked relieved. "Oh, if that's all, Helen will be equal to it; that child has a perfect genius for business. You ought to consult her more; you have no idea how resourceful she is, and as to the other girls, why, it has really been a perfect delight to watch their development. I never interfere, except with a judicious word dropped occasionally when some bit of domestic

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economy corners them. The consequence is that they tell me all their plans, but they work out their perplexities among themselves. They are real soldiers, and they fight well."

"They need another three months' test; it has been plain sailing so far."

"Will, you're a great tease, you know better, it's not all been plain sailing. They've gone into this thing with all their earnest young souls, out of the purest devotion to Helen. They have conquered all their little selfish desires, and have worked shoulder to shoulder for the common good."

Mr. Ormesby laughed. "I love to rouse you, Marian; you're nothing but a girl yourself. Helen certainly gets her enthusiasm straight from you, though I think," he added, a little maliciously, "her head for finance is an Ormesby inheritance. And, by the by, what plans have the august 'Seven' made for the day? I suppose I must make mine accordingly."

"Of course. Now, let me see! Edith takes the eleven o'clock train for Glenhurst, she's to dine with her father and aunt. Sylvia completes their own little family party at her home. The twins eat their Christmas turkey at the hotel with their mother. Ruth devotes the morning to her mother and father, who leave for the West on the mid-day train; her brother is spending the week with a College friend, and the Ashtons being in Philadelphia, our little dinner-party will consist of Helen, Ruth, Josephine, and ourselves, after which Fred Gayle has invited the 'Seven' and you and me to the children's tree, though how he expects to give us house-room passes my understanding."

"Ours not to reason why
Ours but to do and die,"

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groaned Mr. Ormesby, as he retreated to his study and his morning paper.

The girls made short work of their morning tasks, and all turned in full force to the kitchen, to help the "stay-at-homes" with preparations for dinner, and as they worked their tongues flew, for they had acquired that happy faculty of doing both together.

"Doesn't it seem strange that this time last year we were just a happy-go-lucky set of school-girls, intent on enjoying every minute of our holiday?" Ruth was inclined to be reminiscent.

"I remember Helen had us up here to dine—what a spread it was! I covered four pages in a description I sent down home to Mother," said Alice, who was energetically chopping onions and parsley by the kitchen window.

"If we were home now we'd be decorating our big parlors with holly and mistletoe, they would certainly give us an informal dance to-night," and Elsie heaved a small but regretful sigh. "I haven't twirled on my toes, even, since Thanksgiving."

"Heavens! have we a ballet dancer among us?" cried Sylvia. "Elsie has all the jargon—I can waltz a bit, to be sure, but I don't ever remember twirling on my toes. You ought to take this up in serious conclave, Helen, and put a stop to it."

"Maybe we'll tread a stately measure to-night, when Hugh and the others come. Mother is a trump about playing," said Helen.

"Oh, the mistletoe bough!"

hummed Josephine, while the others joined in the doleful chorus.

"I never could quite understand that silly little

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bride," said Edith; "the idea of bundling into a chest in her bridal clothes—a musty, dirty old chest, too, into the bargain."

At length an oak chest that had long lain hid,
Was found in the castle; they raised the lid;
And a skeleton form lay moldering there
In the bridal wreath of that lady fair!
Oh, the mistletoe bough!
Oh, the mistletoe bough!

The full pathos of the old ballad swept over them all for a moment, and the girlish voices rang out with weird intensity, then Ruth broke the spell, saying, in a droll way:

"It preaches its own moral, anyhow—when looking for a lost bride, investigate the old chests first, and then try an 'innovation' trunk if that test fails."

"Talking of chests," said Helen, "Mrs. Trent told me a strange tale about an old carved one she has—quite an heirloom. Her ancestors were Huguenots, and the owner of the chest was hunted out of France, and had to fly for his life. He was smuggled by his frantic family on board a ship bound for America, concealed in this very chest. At the last moment before sailing soldiers came aboard to hunt for him, and after a fruitless search pounced upon the chest, which was huddled in a corner along with other household chattels. The leader eyed it suspiciously, and asked one or two questions, which were glibly answered; then he made a sudden and unexpected lunge with his rapier, through a hole in the top, to make sure no human being was hidden within. The thrust wounded the prisoner's shoulder, but in spite of the pain the fugitive had presence of mind to catch hold of the murderous blade and, as the

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soldier drew it out, to wipe off the tell-tale blood marks with his scarf."

"It makes a good story," said Ruth critically, "and I suppose it's as true as all traditions."

"Oh, the chest is there, and the blood-stained scarf. Mrs. Trent is very proud of them. Poor thing! she looked so eager and animated while she told the little story, and so wan and tired afterward, it nearly broke my heart," and Helen's face grew grave with the memory of it. "I am glad she is here this Christmas, though it's a sad time for Mr. Trent and dear little Rita, who loves her like a daughter."

"Suppose we stop there this afternoon on our way to the Bandbox," said Ruth, using her favorite nickname for Fred's little apartment. "I expect those two are having hard work giving a cheerful tone to things. We can take our fiddler, and have a few tunes, for I heard Fred ask her to bring her violin, so it will be handy."

Josephine laughed. "Well, you certainly have a cool way of arranging things, though I *did* promise Fred I'd bring it if I could."

Helen beamed her approval. "That's what I call the Christmas spirit—it will really hearten them up."

"The right way would be for Mr. Trent and Rita to run out for a whiff of fresh air, while you three stay with the invalid," suggested Edith. "It's always good in nursing—to relieve guard."

"Every day but Christmas," sang Sylvia, wringing out her dish-cloths; "there are no rules for this day—vacation has begun. *Au revoir*, ladies; I go to eat some of the fatted calf they are killing for me at home," and, heading the "dining-out" quartette, Sylvia led the way upstairs.

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Ruth lingered awhile, and then she, too, followed, and Helen and Josephine bent to their work with energy, resolved that this, at least, should be an epoch-making dinner. So busy were they that they hardly looked up as a tall form loomed in the doorway.

"An' did yez think I was goin' to cut me job for a bit of a sore throat?" asked Ann, for Ann it was, less ruddy and substantial than usual, but Ann in the flesh after all, and a pretty good weight at that.

Both girls wheeled around at sight of her.

"Good gracious, Ann! how did you get out of the hospital!" cried Helen.

"On me two legs—an' out the front door. I sez to the doctor, 'How's me throat?' 'Oh, all right,' sez he. 'An' how's me fever?' 'Ye ain't got none,' sez he. 'An' how long will yez kape me here?' 'About three more days,' sez he. 'Not a minute!' sez I, a-shakin' my head. 'Out I goes this morning, an' no mistake,' an' he knowed I meant it, too, for he was such a puny small thing I could have slapped him over with one hand, so we didn't lose time argufyin'. What's for dinner?" and five minutes later Ann had taken the reins, and care fell away from two pairs of young shoulders, as Helen and Josephine fled rejoicing.

They resolved to say nothing of Ann's return until after dinner, and they had much fun simpering over the compliments which the small but appreciative family lavished upon them. Little touches that only Ann could give were commented upon by Mr. and Mrs. Ormesby, and the situation was almost too much for the giggling maids who waited on the table.

Finally, when it was time to serve the traditional plum pudding, there was a little flutter and commotion in the butler's pantry, out of which Ann emerged, bear-

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ing her trophy, wrapped in blue flames, and sizzling and sputtering in the most festive way.

Of course, her appearance produced exactly the sensation they had expected, and with modest pride, toned down by her table manners, Ann answered the interested questions of Mr. and Mrs. Ormesby. The kind-hearted soul had worried and fretted so much over leaving her "young ladies" in the lurch during the holidays, that there was literally no way of holding her back, the house surgeon telephoned later, so he considered it better in this case to humor the whim, and Helen laughed as she heard, remembering Ann's version in the kitchen.

It was three o'clock and the short winter's day was on the wane as Mrs. Trent's trim little maid opened the door for the trio, who came in, rosy from the cold, laden with fruit and a bottle of Mr. Ormesby's rare old wine.

They found the invalid propped up in a large easy chair, before a fire of blazing logs, which illumined the whole of the otherwise shadowy room. The delicate oval face, with its crown of silver hair, looked very beautiful with the glow of the firelight upon it, and the soft eyes turned gratefully to her visitors, while Rita smiled her greeting, and Philip, roused from the sudden depression that had fallen on him, drew up chairs, and widened the circle round the hearth.

"This is very kind of you," he said, as he relieved them of their coats and bundles. "I think we three were just a little tired of one another. We have had almost too much Christmas, and it's been rather exciting—we feel 'done up' in consequence." He looked meaningfully at his mother. "I've been so stupid, too," he added, "that she and Rita have agreed in pronouncing me a bore."

"For shame!" said Mrs. Trent softly, laying her

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thin hand on his head, for he sat on a favorite low stool at her knee. "It was only the quiet room and the fading daylight that made him sober; now your company has banished all that; it was a shame to shut himself up all day with a stupid old woman, but there was no use—I could not move him."

"It was just a case of Mahomet and the mountain," said Ruth. "If he couldn't get near it one way, he did the other, so here we are, bag and baggage, including the violin. Josephine promised to play some Christmas glee for the youngsters, and she thought perhaps Mrs. Trent would like some music."

"She didn't think at all, it was entirely Ruth's suggestion; but if you care for it—" said Josephine.

"Dear old Josephine! she's more modest than most geniuses," interrupted Helen; "her music is a treat, but we want to chatter a bit first, and you are only to look and listen."

Then the girls, in their blithest mood, launched forth into vivid descriptions of the day's doings, including a graphic account of the return of Ann, told in Ruth's most florid style, which sent echoes of laughter around the big room. "And what we have to expect when we reach Fred's square foot of house-room there's no telling," she wound up with a shake of her head.

"There are nine of us alone, to say nothing of the tree, and not counting Fred and the children," said Helen. "I must say I'm wondering. It's like putting a square peg in a round hole."

"Perhaps they have a small tree," suggested Rita.

"No, I'm assured it's the average size, bigger than most, Will told me," said Ruth. "I hope we'll come out of it alive, we are taking everything on faith—it's the only way."

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"What a glorious blaze!" exclaimed Helen. "To me, there's nothing like these great old-fashioned fireplaces for solid comfort."

Philip reached for the poker. "Would you like to punch that log?" he asked. "In my childish days that was my greatest privilege."

"Oh, yes!" she cried, "unless you'd rather—"

He smiled. "No, I'm yielding the pleasure voluntarily. Perhaps you've never punched a log before?"

"No, never."

"Then I envy you that first sensation."

"Do I rise for action?"

"That depends upon your mood; if you are ruminative, you can do it sitting, if you are combative, you do it standing."

"I'm a fighter born—I'll do it standing," and, taking the poker, Helen prepared for the onslaught.

With the first blow the great log trembled, with the second it shivered and fell apart in a shower of crimson, glowing embers, scattering all over the fireplace.

"How lovely!" cried the girls.

"It's truly the heart of the blaze," said Josephine; "that throbbing, almost living flame color is wonderful."

"It's the fire in its death throes; we must give it more food or it dies," and taking a fresh log from the woodbox Philip threw it on, and they watched the little tongues of flame darting around it, and heard the snapping, crackling sound as the green wood caught. Then, of a sudden, the room seemed full of light, as the fire roared lustily up the chimney.

The invalid brightened under the spell of youth which seemed to fill the place. Philip threw off his sober mood and the talk grew lively, while time flew and the hand of the inexorable clock pointed to the hour of leave-

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taking. Then Josephine reached for her violin, and soon the magic of her music was upon them, while the brilliant glow from the fire died down, and the room once more filled with mysterious shadows. Mrs. Trent's serene face was full of gratitude as she bade her visitors good-by.

"You have made this day a happy memory to my boy," she whispered, as Helen bent over her for a farewell kiss. "He will have need of his memories soon; thank you for the pleasant hour," and Helen's tears were perilously near the surface as she groped her way to the door.

"I cannot begin to tell you how grateful we all are for this bit of sunshine," said Philip Trent, as they stood in the hall outside, waiting for the elevator.

"You've just played Santa Claus all day," added Rita, "from the pretty gifts in the morning, to the beautiful music just now."

"And you, Rita, it's a wonder you've not put out your eyes with the dainty work you did for us; I almost feel like scolding instead of thanking you," and Ruth put an arm affectionately about her, while Helen added, in a quiet undertone to Philip:

"The flowers were lovely. I would have worn a rose to-day, but it was so cold. I hated to blight a single one; they are blooming in my room just now."

"I hope roses will always bloom for you—even in December," answered Philip.

Then the elevator came and whisked the girls downstairs, and again the scene changed, with kaleidoscopic swiftness. As they reached the "Bandbox," the usual scamper to the door followed their ring, and this time Will, with the Prince at his heels, opened it with a flourish.

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"Merry Christmas! Please squeeze in any room but the parlor—which means Kitty's room, Uncle Fred's room, or the kitchen. If you'll kindly take off your coats in the hall you'll find it more convenient for turning around. Uncle Fred says that Kitty must even try and shorten her sentences, that there won't be room for an extra word; that's rather hard lines on poor old Kit, isn't it? She loves to hear herself spout."

"Down, Prince!" cried Ruth, laughing, as the puppy sprang upon her; "there isn't even room for an extra jump. Are the others here—where's the tree?"

"Behind yonder doors," said Kitty, appearing at her own, and pointing a sepulchral finger. "No, you're the first. I hope they'll come one by one, then we can pack them in nicely, like sardines."

"They most probably will," said Helen, "as they come from the four corners of the earth."

"I hope the walls won't bulge," said Will doubtfully. "These apartments are advertised as suitable for young couples and light housekeeping, you don't mind if the beams crack just a little, do you?"

Kitty shuddered. "If that's a joke, Will, you'd better take it back. Uncle Fred said yours were too heavy for this place. There's the bell!"

Then they all trooped in, and it was really surprising how, with very little shifting, the full dozen, with the exception of Fred himself and the much-enduring Nora, were stowed away.

"Uncle Fred wouldn't let us in the parlor," explained Kitty, with a little prance of excitement, "and there's been such hammering and pounding for three whole days—it must be something wonderful."

They had not long to wait. Nora, with flushed face and cap awry, announced that all was ready, the

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portières were pushed back, and the company crowded forward into the darkened room. Fred's voice greeted them from somewhere in space, and when their eyes became accustomed to things, they found that the tree, instead of being rooted to the floor, was floating from the ceiling, and Fred, robed as Santa Claus, occupied a cleverly constructed airship close by, also depending from the ceiling, which was draped with cloudlike effect with blue and white cheese cloth. The patron Saint was provided with a hooked stick, and a fair-sized basket, worked by means of an improvised pulley; this unique arrangement left plenty of floor room for the guests, who crowded in with much laughter and genuine admiration for the clever scheme.

"Here, Will, stand below and deliver the goods," called Santa Claus, and then ensued a period of such wholesome fun as only youth can know, and Mr. and Mrs. Ormesby forgot they were not children, and laughed and shouted over the quaint jokes and the odd gifts, just as the others did, for scarcely a thing upon the laden tree had cost more than time and thought and ingenuity. But Fred Gayle, in spite of the sober cares that were thrust upon him, was a mere boy at heart, a college boy into the bargain, and he found a bevy of kindred souls in these laughter-loving, light-hearted girls.

The day closed in upon them and the street lights began to glimmer, while the fun went on; it was Mrs. Ormesby who broke the spell:

"Girls, girls!" she cried, "you forget we are expecting guests at home, and even the best of things must come to an end."

"Just one thing more," said Josephine, signaling the two children and tuning her violin, and then, to the daintiest of accompaniments, the young voices burst into

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one of those old-time Christmas carols that have charmed the world through centuries. Both Kitty and Will had a keen, true ear for harmony, but while Kitty's was a thin, tuneful piping of an unfledged voice, Will's clear boyish soprano rang out with wonderful sweetness.

Glee after glee they sang, filling the tiny place with melody. Josephine had trained them well, and they were so proud of this—their latest accomplishment—that they might have gone on indefinitely, had not the Prince become wearied of it all. With an indescribable expression upon his usually cheerful countenance, with drooping head and tail between his legs, he sat down on the floor in the middle of the room and howled dismally. This succeeded most effectually in breaking up the party, and with many jests and much laughter, the guests took their leave.

On reaching home, they found Hugh and his friends making themselves quite comfortable in the library. Hugh had prepared the "Seven" for half a dozen, but there were ten strong, robust, healthy fellows, with "good appetite" written all over their sturdy frames. Even Mrs. Ormesby's heart sank when she reflected on the contrast between their company and the somewhat limited state of their larder, and when Hugh announced—after the usual Christmas greetings—that he and the fellows had just dropped in for an informal bite, Helen felt a wild and sisterly desire to shake him.

There must be immediate and earnest consultation during the necessary donning of lighter housegowns, so Helen signaled her mother to fill in the breach, and the girls fled to their rooms.

Helen heard her brother rush up the stairs just as she was slipping out of her street dress, so she threw on her wrapper and stood ready to hurl a good piece of

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her mind at him, but he passed her door and went to the telephone beyond:

"Hello!" he said, when he got the number, "the family are home now, you men can come up whenever you like." He had just put up the receiver when Helen flung wide her door, and confronted him with righteous wrath in every feature.

"Weren't there enough people downstairs?" she asked with withering sarcasm. "Why did you have to invite more?"

Hugh laughed. "There'll only be a couple more, and they'll be sure to make themselves useful. I thought you liked these little impromptu affairs, sister mine."

"So I do, when all things are equal, but Ann's being sick has kept us all behind, and we haven't enough to feed them—that's the truth, it isn't inhospitality," but Hugh looked concerned.

"Shall we go away again? I should have remembered—I'm awfully sorry—truly."

"Will you ever be more than a great big careless boy!" sighed Helen.

"Oh, it takes you to grow up and have wisdom beyond your years. I'm afraid I'm doomed to everlasting childhood. Hurry down, Sis, don't let on it's a trouble, whatever you do," and Hugh, shaking off all responsibility from his broad shoulders, ran downstairs again as the front doorbell echoed through the house.

Over the banisters, where she stood peeping, Helen saw the expansive shirt fronts of two more men, and she groaned aloud. The girls, knowing the exigencies of the occasion, made hasty toilets and joined Helen in her room.

"We've plenty of cake and bread, if we cut thin slices," said Elsie, "and cold turkey. We'll make a for-

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midable dish if we carve it right, and Ann can do something in the way of biscuits and toast, and we can fill up with Christmas candies and fruit."

"Tell Mary to do her best in decorating the table with all the Christmas frills we have around, and we'll do what we can on the short rations," commanded Helen. "Come on, girls; relays of three can entertain the guests, while the others hustle, and poor Mummie must slip away to change her gown, she must be blessing us."

As the girls went down, they paused for a moment in the great hall, to divide forces. Helen sent Josephine, Edith and Ruth into the library, while she and her three assistants invaded the dining-room on their way downstairs to consult Ann.

As they opened the door, the table—gorgeous in its cut glass and beautiful silver and damask—burst upon them. Two waiters, in full regalia, who were neither Jerry nor John, bustled around officiously, and delicious odors floated to them from the butler's pantry beyond. For one moment they stared wide-eyed, then the situation dawned upon them, and Sylvia, in her excitement, caught Helen's arm in an ecstatic pinch.

"Terry's men!" she whispered, "what a treat!" But Helen drew her companions quickly out of the room, while the waiters' backs were still turned to them.

"It was meant as a surprise—don't spoil it," and so, instead of descending to Ann, they sailed into the library in the highest spirits, while their mates stared at them in wonder, and even Mrs. Ormesby looked puzzled as she slipped away to change her gown.

Such an evening as it was! Surely the Christmas spirit went like wine to their heads, for there was no other stimulant at the dainty supper. Afterward they

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pushed back the furniture in the foyer, and Mrs. Ormesby played for them to dance, and the day died as it began, right merrily.

"I wonder what will happen next?" said Edith, as the "Seven" separated for the night. "I find this life full of surprises."

"Now comes work—hard work—if we're to make good," said Helen, as she turned into her own cozy quarters. There was a smile on her face, but determination in her eye, and the girls knew that their Chief meant what she said.

As for Helen, she "builded better than she knew," for the trial days *did* come, and sooner than she expected.

CHAPTER XII

THE holidays were over; the throngs of youthful merry-makers had departed for school or college; the city had taken off its wreaths and garlands, and "Every Day"—with its many duties and its occasional pleasures—was somewhat of a relief, after the uncertain though pleasant excitement of the Yuletide.

The "We are Seven Club" felt the stir of the New Year energy. Each one went about her allotted tasks in such a vigorous way that the house machinery moved smoothly, and there was time to spare for many things which had seemed impossible heretofore.

"It is wonderful how we can shake down," said Ruth, as she and Helen were taking their turn at the bedmaking. "When I first came, I tucked away my fountain pen, and buried reams of writing-paper in the bottom of my trunk; now I've fished them out and intend to go to work on the greatest novel of the age."

"Modest child," laughed Helen, "I don't aim so high. I'm going to learn dressmaking—I'm in rags."

"Ye gods! I forgot about clothes. We *are* in a sorry plight, that's a fact; we all need new ones."

"I was talking to Miss Pierce about that, only yesterday," said Helen, "she says to begin on the old ones first, remodeling is fine practice, and then, when we feel sure of ourselves we can cut boldly into new cloth; there's a lot of material in our shabby things."

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"Oh, I daresay!" sighed Ruth. "Old clothes remind me of review days in College, 'dead easy' but so tame."

"Never mind, we'll be able to get new things in the springtime, and there's so much more variety," cried Sylvia consolingly, from the doorway. "Let's have a ripping-bee, each one bring the dress she wants to alter, and we can talk by the way."

"Two of Sylvia's favorite pastimes; look out, we'll throw the whole job upon you," threatened Ruth.

"I wouldn't mind; piecing and contriving are lots of fun."

"You'll have all you can do to attend to your own very important business," said Helen decidedly, "we'll each have our hands full, I fancy. Sylvia's ripping plan isn't bad, and it will not look so hopeless in a bunch, if we talk of something else."

"My principal grievance is silk underskirts," said Josephine, joining the little group at Helen's door. "I'm reduced to one, for street wear, and every day I cut a frayed strip off the flounce."

"You'll soon reach the plight of the old woman in the jingle—'who cut off her petticoats up to her knees,'" remarked Helen, giving a final pat to the counterpane.

Josephine raised her hands: "Don't talk of knees, I think with the next wearing, mine will come through the body of the skirt. If I should be run over by an automobile, I shouldn't know how to explain that skirt."

"Then for the honor of the 'Seven' I vote you make another," cried Ruth. "If you're going to have an accident, have it comfortably, by all means."

And so the dressmaking began in earnest. There were breathless days of cutting and fitting; there were "trying on" hours with the "dummies," for Miss Pierce had three or four adjustable figures, and there were

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often frantic cries for help when some bold adventurer went beyond her depth; then Miss Pierce came to the rescue and pulled the rash one to shore. If it had not been for Sylvia and the twins, the poor lady would have had her hands full, but these three practical maidens put the others quite to shame, though they floundered on doggedly.

"It's not my vocation, that's all," said Edith, basting a seam for the third time, because she could not keep it from puckering, "some people take to it naturally, and then grow arrogant and boast about it. It's only that my intellect is a different shape from yours, it doesn't lean toward dressmaking—it's a very worldly art anyway; if some simple mode of dress could be adopted for the whole world, there'd be much more time for other things."

Ruth laughed as she watched Edith trying the effect of a broad chinchilla collar on her blue cloth coat. "Like dear old Emerson and his Transcendentalists, a sort of a meal-bag costume tied in the middle, with a simple flat hat tied under the chin. Canst see the picture?" Ruth was always forceful in illustration, and there was a ripple of laughter around the sewing-room. "Can't you fancy our blue-eyed seraph in a costume like that!"

"Of course, one must wear what custom has made the right thing," said Edith, patting her fur affectionately, "but all the same—"

"I'm very thankful to be modern and up-to-date," said Elsie. "If Alice and I took to queer dressing, we'd be 'the observed of all observers.' It's very conspicuous to be a twin anyway."

"But you have your advantages," said Helen. "You can always buy things, two-for-a-quarter, where we separate personages have to pay fifteen cents a-piece."

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"Helen always has such an eye to the main chance, she would have loved to be a twin," said Ruth.

"No, I'm contented with my sphere—the position of only daughter is very pleasant."

Miss Pierce looked forward to these lively afternoons. The chatter of the girls chased away the silence of the big sewing-room, and the lonely little seamstress forgot her prim ways and remembered her youth, in laughing with them.

By the middle of January, Hugh's ship was on its way across the ocean, and by the end of the month, Mrs. Trent's serene presence had vanished from among them. The end came quietly; it was as if she had folded her hands and passed away in her sleep. Philip was stunned at first. Even though expected, the blow fell swiftly. One day the sunlight streamed in at the big bay window where she sat, showering its healthful rays upon her fragile figure, the next—it fell upon her vacant chair, and reverent hands shut it out gently from the quiet room where she lay, in the midst of a world of flowers.

The girls were all profoundly stirred, and hovered around Rita, who seemed heartbroken. Since the great Trent failure the family had withdrawn from many of their friends—a fatal mistake if friendship counts for anything—and so the Trents were practically alone in their time of stress, save for a few old servants, who were faithful, and a few tried friends, who would not be shaken off.

Mrs. Ormesby, who liked the grave young man and his quiet ways, went at once to him in his trouble, and the "Seven" did what they could to lighten the burden in the darkened home.

"I cannot bear to break things up," Philip said, when

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the funeral was over, and Mrs. Ormesby asked him about his plans, "but I can't leave Rita here alone. I do not want to sell these precious bits of home, and the poor little girl loves them as much as I do. Mother never planned ahead; she knew how it pained me, and I confess I'm at sea."

"I was thinking," said Mrs. Ormesby, "how nice it would be if Fred's little motherless girl could have Rita as a companion and guide. Her very misfortune places her apart from other girls, and if Fred could move his family here—it is hardly a stone's throw away—and it would solve your problem if we could arrange it. I know a nice middle-aged woman who would take the housekeeping off her hands, and the children would inevitably chase the shadows away and brighten her up."

Philip brightened himself, as Mrs. Ormesby drew the picture. "Of course," she continued, "this arrangement may not be permanent, but it would relieve your mind just now regarding Rita, and you could make other plans when College closes. Shall I see what I can do?"

"You are so kind," said Philip, "I hardly know how to thank you. My plans *are* unsettled. I should not care to tie to College work; I need a more active life. I had thought of the law in the old days, but I cannot take the time for the study, now. I have an ambition to become something in the financial world, to retrieve in part, what my father forfeited, and I think I should be fairly capable. However," with a short sigh, "that's in the future. The College needs me just now, and my place is there. I can never forget what you've all done for me, never."

Thus encouraged, Mrs. Ormesby laid the situation before Fred. He looked at her comically, and ran his hands through his hair.

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"How am I ever to succeed as a disciplinarian if, the minute I train these youngsters of mine to Spartanlike endurance, you fling them back into the lap of luxury? Of course we'll come, because little Miss Rita is a trump, and shouldn't be left alone. She couldn't come here, because there's not space enough to squeeze in a hairpin, but just now, with mid-winter examinations staring me out of countenance—"

"Trust to us," said Helen, who happened to be with her mother. "There is very little we 'Seven' cannot do, let me tell you. An hour's energetic work will dispose of your whole establishment. You can store what furniture you don't need, and the rest will find plenty of house-room in that big place."

He laughed. "You put the picture before me in a few bold strokes. I won't be utterly helpless, but if you will convey the live stock, meaning the kids and the puppy, with their own particular and peculiar belongings, I'll attend to the still-life portion of the concern. Nora, of course, must seek another field of labor; bless her dear Irish soul, I can give her a reference for endurance."

And so quickly was it all settled, that within a week the Bandbox was deserted, and before Philip went back to his work, he had become accustomed to the ring of the young voices, and could smile over the wordy battles between the brother and sister, in which Will, with his keener sense of humor, usually came out the victor. Even the Prince grew accustomed to his new surroundings, and the fact that he could really turn around three times before settling down into a comfortable position, was balm to his doggish soul.

Kitty, at once, took Rita under her protection, and it was a pretty sight to see the two together, for Rita's

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gentle ways showed their unconscious influence in toning down the little tomboy, and a certain girlish sweetness rose to the surface in Kitty's gentler moments.

"One by one the roses fall!" sighed Ruth, when Philip Trent had told them good-by and turned his back on the city. "The masculine gender is slowly but surely being stricken from our social grammar. What next, I wonder!"

"Say, rather 'Who next?'" said Sylvia, and her question was answered in the most unexpected way.

"Helen, can you spare me a few minutes?" asked her father, one morning as they rose from the breakfast-table, and Helen, wondering, followed him into his den, a cozy little room shut off from the farther end of the library. She could remember all through her small girlhood, with what awe this very room had inspired her. "Father in his den" was a very different person from the genial "Daddy" of the library or the nursery. Childish difficulties were always adjusted in this sacred retreat, where "Father" sat upon all important matters with a grave, judicial countenance, so, although in a measure she had outgrown these feelings, she knew that something momentous was in the very air.

"Sit down, my dear," he said, in what Helen afterward described to her mother as his "austerely paternal tone," as he pushed a big chair impressively forward. Helen sank into its depth and waited. Mr. Ormesby sat down before his big table-desk and sorted some important-looking papers, making various little jottings on a small pad; finally he looked up with this startling announcement:

"Helen, I sail for England on the fifteenth of March."

Helen bounced up in her chair; this was something

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quite outside of her calculations. Her father smiled in spite of himself:

"I knew it would strike you; it did your mother, but it seems inevitable at this crisis. There was a Directors' meeting last week and the choice fell upon me, I cannot shirk the responsibility."

"Of course not," she answered promptly. "Does it mean much?"

"A whole lot—it might mean failure, against which I try to be forearmed, but it may mean success, which, in that case, would be stupendous. What I want to do, is to husband my resources, and that is why I'm consulting you. What can you suggest?"

"I can't tell," said Helen warily, "I don't know exactly where you stand."

"Neither do I," he said frankly. "That problem will not be solved until I reach the other side, but I thought in the meantime, if we could manage a little more retrenchment of household expenses, so that I might put by something for a rainy day, in case things went wrong—"

"I see," said Helen gravely, "now let me think—I suppose this is where we come in—the 'Seven,' I mean."

"Well perhaps so, though, in this instance I confess, it is *your* judgment solely upon which I rely. Suppose you think it over and evolve some economical plan in, say, a week's time."

"I'm always evolving economical plans; they're always simmering, and now that you've stirred the pot, they're bubbling over. Would you like to hear one of them?"

"Provided it's not a Castle in the air."

"Now, Daddy, aren't we pinned to the earth, and aren't we doing the severely practical with all our honest

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might and main? Wait, I'll be back in a moment, I want to show you something," and she was up and out of the room in a flash. Five minutes later she came back with a small ledger, which she handed to her father. "These are my Farm accounts," she explained. "Will you just glance over them?"

He opened the book with some curiosity, and turned over page after page, filled with Helen's neat figures.

"You're quite a book-keeper," he remarked, in his fatherly, patronizing manner, then as he began to study the careful work, his interest grew keener.

"Why, see here!" he exclaimed. "Have you made a mistake, or do you mean to tell me that these big sums you have jotted down from time to time are really your profits?"

Helen nodded.

"Exactly what I mean. The Farm—even the little corner I've been working—is a paying proposition, with a good head to supervise it."

"Whose, for instance? Jerry seems to me both honest and capable."

"Jerry's a dear; he can do nicely whatever he's told, but mine is the head. I made all that profit out of a meager supply of winter vegetables and butter and eggs. Fred Gayle has been a wonderful help, of course. His pleasant ways have attracted a long list of customers, but I've been thinking lately that the Farm ought to yield us a good deal more. There are possibilities in chickens, for instance, beyond the dreams of avarice. There's the dairy, too! and as for the flowers, it is well known that we have the finest conservatories for miles around. Jerry brings in a cartload for the house twice a week, and he says you couldn't tell they had been picked. They are just wasted. There's an acre or so planted in straw-

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berries. Jerry says the yield will be enormous this season. We'll have our hands full in the spring, for the 'Seven' love out-door life, and my idea is, that if we work things in the right way we will make enough to more than cover our expenses out there."

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Mr. Ormesby, a funny little note of respect in his voice, that was secretly very gratifying to Helen, though she wisely made no comment. "Your mother and I have been talking over a plan," he continued, "which seems to me to coincide with many of your really practical ideas. I may be abroad at least three months, and we thought if you girls would be willing to close this house by the fifteenth of March, the backbone of the winter would be broken sufficiently to make living out there quite endurable. You could come in and out, of course, whenever you wished, and it would merely be one establishment instead of two, which would simplify matters and reduce expenses—do you see?"

"I see better than that," said Helen. "I think with the Farm fund steadily growing, there is no reason why we cannot bear the entire expense during your absence; it's only for three months, and if it eats up my whole surplus, it will be money well spent, but I have such firm faith in the financial prowess of the Ormesby family, that I can't think of failure for you, Daddy, dear."

"Then it's settled, you would all be willing to move out to the Farm?"

Helen raised a restraining hand. "Not so fast, you impetuous boy. I have to lay the matter before the Club, and we have to pass upon it in regular form. Our rules are strictly parliamentary. The plan sounds very feasible," she added, in her gravest tone, though her eyes danced with fun. "I will let you have the report as soon as possible."

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The formal conference being at an end, Helen perched herself on her father's knee and laid her head upon his shoulder. "Oh, Daddy, how we shall miss you!" she cried, and two or three real salt tears glistened on his black coat; then she dropped a light kiss upon his forehead, caught up her ledger, and departed to call a council of war. On her way she peeped in at her mother's boudoir.

"The confab is over," she said. "The Farm plan is a 'go,' Mummie. Daddy will tell you the outcome, I must summon the Clan. I feel like Roderick Dhu or James Fitz James, or the whole bunch rolled into one. It's very exciting," and Helen sped away, full of that unfailing enthusiasm which was always so inspiring.

A consultation in the morning was quite out of the order of the day, and the wondering girls assembled in Helen's room—Edith and Sylvia lugging the darning-bag.

"We can't be idle with this mountain confronting us," explained Edith, "and on our darning day there is always an overflow; take a stocking apiece, girls, you can think better if you are occupied. Now, then, Helen, what's up?" And Helen plunged in with such eagerness that she had the girls with her in a moment.

"The jolliest thing I ever heard," declared Sylvia, "New York is abominable in March, with the wind and the rain, to say nothing of the snow."

"It's windy out at the Farm, too, don't deceive yourself," warned Helen.

"Oh, we know," said Alice, "but there's the promise of spring in the very open, and it's beautiful to be on the spot and watch it come. Elsie and I used to have all sorts of fantastic ideas about the coming of spring, when we were little children; we used to play so much in our big old-fashioned garden that we always contended that

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the flowers told us; we used to sit for hours close to the bare ground and watch the tiny little tender shoots which seemed to spring up overnight, and Uncle Ned, our old gardener, said that we conjured up the very roses on the bushes, we grew so wise in all the flower secrets."

This was a long speech from Alice, who was usually quiet and reserved. Helen looked at her in surprise. The twins had often surprised her; she had not given them credit for so much depth, though she had liked their sweet Southern ways, with the odd accentuations of speech, which, while most attractive, seemed quite foreign to the others. The slow and easy grace of their movements was very deceptive; they glided through their tasks, while the others hurried in true Yankee fashion, but never once had they been found behindhand in accomplishment. The dreamy Southern eyes were the windows of two very active young souls, and so when Alice spoke as she did, Helen clapped her hands softly.

"I believe you're a poet," she said.

"No, neither is Elsie, we just love the things that grow—that's all—we've lived so much in the open, you see, and this idea of going into the country is a perfect delight."

"Girls, the country work of the twins is cut out for them. We'll hand them over the conservatories and the flower garden, and I daresay the vegetable customers will give us orders for flowers as well. Josephine and Ruth will have charge of the poultry, which will of course include eggs, and Sylvia and Edith had better learn the mysteries of the dairy—how does that suit?"

They all beamed approval.

"I'm going to stick to my vegetables and small fruits," continued Helen, "and if among us we cannot make the Farm pay, why the 'Seven' will disband. Jerry has a

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good force out there, so we'll have plenty of help with the rougher work. What we will have to do is to manage and plan and see that orders are filled."

"How about the housework and the cooking?" asked Josephine.

"Oh, we'll have our share I daresay, but Mrs. Dennison takes charge out there, and our own force of servants is quite enough. We'll do the mending and darning, and attend to our rooms, and help Ann in the kitchen, and be ready to lend a hand when needed, and I think we'll enjoy the change of routine. Besides, if Daddy leaves us, we won't feel so deserted out in the country. We'll be so busy sitting on the ground and watching the little shoots spring up—as Alice so beautifully remarks—that time will fly, and honestly, I don't think Mother could stand the loneliness of this big house with the Master gone."

"Then put it to vote at once," said Ruth briskly, "for the sooner we begin to study our new vocations, the better; the greatest novel in the world will have to wait another three months, I'm afraid, while I learn the ways of downy chicks and pullets and roosters and hens—and eggs."

"'Hang up the fiddle and the bow,'" sang Josephine, "henceforward we will lead an active life, Ruth, you and I."

"I think our lot is the best," said Edith. "Your dairy is a pattern, Helen. I peeped into it that day we spent at the Farm, it looked so cool and clean and white."

"And to skim real cream off of a pan of milk that isn't watery blue, will put me in the seventh heaven," said Sylvia ecstatically. "I really think this little hitch in the Ormesby finance department was specially arranged for

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seven ignoramuses," pursued Sylvia, "it makes me shudder to think what helpless beings we were in the old days."

"Young ladies, in the words of Professor Felton, let me again remind you that our education is never completed," quoted Helen. "There are situations and conditions out at the Farm not dreamed of in your philosophy."

"When the Chief quotes Shakespere, it's time to run!" cried Ruth. "Let's have our vote, girls, and go to our daily jobs."

So that very evening Helen was able to lay the formal acceptance of the new proposition on her father's desk.

"The vote was unanimous," she said. "I told you, Daddy, how the 'Seven' would do. We don't believe in sitting down quietly and waiting for things to come to us; we're constantly looking for new worlds to conquer; it's been a sort of watchword for us this year. We're going to make good."

"I almost think you will, but I'll reserve my verdict until my return."

The next three weeks flew as if on wings, there was so much to do in preparing the big house for a longer nap than usual, that the day of Mr. Ormesby's departure, and the exodus to the Farm, was upon them before they knew it. At first it was decided that only Mrs. Ormesby and Helen should see the traveler on his way, but at the final moment, Helen herself changed their plan.

"Mummie and I would be so horribly choky that we would disgrace ourselves. No, we'll all go, and give him a great send-off; it's much better."

And so it was, for Mr. Ormesby's last sight of them as he stood on deck, staring with dimmed eyes across the ever-widening distance, he carried with him through

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the long months ; just a group of bright, loving, glowing young faces, with his wife and Helen beside them, the two bronze heads so dear to him and so curiously alike, catching the sparkling rays of the winter sunlight. They were all smiling bravely, and he smiled too, and waved his handkerchief until he could see them no more, and they turned away, not back to the deserted house, but to the Farm, with its many allurements and its untried fields.

CHAPTER XIII

FOR two days after their arrival at the Farm, things looked very gray and hopeless. It rained incessantly, and the big Elizabethan hall, with its ingle nook and its cheerful fire, was a veritable Mecca to the "Seven," while the winds blew in perfect tornadoes, and the rain pattered dismally on the tin roof, and drove against the window-panes.

Of course there was much to do in settling down and learning all the new ways, and packing their belongings into the quaint gabled rooms upstairs. Mrs. Dennison was in her usual flutter over the extra household, but soon stopped wringing her hands and looking worried, when she saw how quietly and dexterously care was lifted from her shoulders.

"We're going to give you a real vacation," said Helen. "You are only to supervise, Mrs. Dennison, until we know your country ways. It won't take us long to learn, once the rain stops."

"I wouldn't mind rain if it wasn't so wet," was Ruth's brilliant remark. "So much of it is so sloppy, it oozes into one's brains somehow."

"It certainly does," laughed Josephine, "if you are a specimen."

"I don't mind the rain, it's all in the day's work," said Sylvia. "It *must* stop sometimes, like Ruth's proposed novel—if that ever begins."

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"What philosophy—what noble philosophy!" growled Ruth, "and what do *you* know about my novel anyway? There may be long and secret hours, in which I toil 'unknownst' and burn the midnight oil. Who can tell!"

"I can," said Elsie, her faithful room-mate. "The only time she ever burned any oil at all, was over a bit of Latin translation that she promised to work out for Fred Gayle."

"You little villain!" cried Ruth, shaking her. "I only tackled it for fun, and I didn't want it to stump me. I'd just as soon translate it for Mrs. Dennison—so there!"

"You're pretty safe," said Edith, "Mrs. Dennison does not run to Latin."

"The idea of Mrs. Dennison *running* to anything is very amusing," observed Alice, and as the vision of the good, portly lady, sprinting along, tickled each girlish fancy, laughter began to grow; it came in ripples first, and then in peals of merriment; then it rose to shrieks as the girls tried in vain to stifle it.

Mrs. Ormesby, in her room, looked up from the letter she was writing to her husband, and smiled sympathetically, wondering what the fun could be, and Mrs. Dennison came trotting into the hall to find out what was the matter. The sight of her was a "clincher"; the laughter broke out afresh. The girls flung themselves among the sofa-cushions, or writhed on the floor, or leaned against the windows, the prey of irrepressible laughter; they held their hands to their sides with such distorted countenances, that poor Mrs. Dennison, glancing from one to the other, shook her head, and muttering "Jamaica Ginger," trotted out to put her threat into execution.

"Stop her, for Heaven's sake!" cried Helen, who

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was the first to find her voice, and by degrees they simmered down.

"I'm quite spent; I hate to laugh that way," said Josephine, wiping her eyes. "I suppose the rain got on our nerves and turned us into a set of gigglers. I'd better go out and reassure Mrs. Dennison, and get the mail. I saw John come up the path a while ago with the bag, and it had a weighty look."

By the time she returned, Mrs. Ormesby, eager and expectant, had joined the group around the fire.

"Your father will send a note by the pilot, of course," she said to Helen, and she was not disappointed. The few hurried, precious lines were there, and Mrs. Ormesby flushed as prettily as any girl over her first love-letter. There was another envelope lying unheeded in her lap, but the cramped, angular writing attracted Helen.

"Mummie, we're in for it," she said; "that's from Aunt Henrietta."

Mrs. Ormesby glanced down at it and groaned. "This can only mean one thing," she said—"an earlier visit than usual. I wonder why."

"May I see Daddy's letter?" asked Helen.

"Yes, it's only a word, of course, but it is a comfort. Now for this," and Mrs. Ormesby broke the crested seal that Miss Darcy always used.

DEAR MARIAN:

What wild goose chase is this of Will's, dashing off to Europe and leaving you to manage a perfect hornet's nest of irresponsible girls! I don't feel easy or comfortable about you, and I am coming to pay my annual visit earlier than usual, as soon indeed as you can assure me that the awful rains I hear you've been having haven't made a perfect swamp of the place. Will you please tell Mary I'd like the North room aired, and the big open fireplace in action, at least once a day, until I come,

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to take away the dampness. I always did feel that you were foolish to own so much property in a malarial district; but that's your affair, of course. I may come on Thursday—or perhaps Saturday; at any rate, John and Jerry can keep a lookout for me.

Your affectionate aunt,

HENRIETTA M. DARCY.

"Mercy on us—what a martinet Aunt Henrietta is!" exclaimed Helen when her mother had read the note aloud. "What are we going to do about it? She actually talks as if you were the most browbeaten person. A hornets' nest indeed! I'd like to shake her. She may be fond of you, Mummie—I daresay she is—but she must be taught a thing or two."

"Poor old lady!" said Mrs. Ormesby. "She loves to come here, but she doesn't like to show it, that's all. She's of the poor and proud kind, you know."

"Yes, but she needn't go ordering you about as if you were a chit of a girl—'I must have this and that,' and 'see that this is done' and 'send John and Jerry for me'—and she doesn't notice *us*, the mighty 'Seven,' any more than if we were flies."

"Perhaps it would be more convenient to have her later," said Mrs. Ormesby doubtfully; "she *does* sound intensely disagreeable."

"One time is as good as another," said Helen. "Better have her when she wants to come, only let *me* invite her. I'd like to write her a letter that will make her sit up and wonder."

"She may think me more browbeaten than ever," laughed Mrs. Ormesby.

"She'll soon change her mind when she meets you—wait a minute, inspiration seizes me," and snatching one of Sylvia's drawing pencils—that young person was

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sketching by the window—Helen turned over Miss Henrietta's envelope and wrote a rough draught of her reply on the back of it.

"Of course it must come from you, Mummie," she said, when she had finished, "now listen":

DEAR AUNT HENRIETTA:

Your note has just reached me and I have put the matter of your coming into the hands of Helen and her friends. You know—for this experimental year—I am an honored guest in my own home, and I was not disappointed when they authorized me to extend to you their cordial invitation to spend your usual month at the farm. Of course, everything is in their hands; but I have the utmost faith in their ability to make you comfortable, and I have no doubt you will share this feeling with me when you come.

Helen begs me to say that she is sorry about the North room; that one, and two more of the larger rooms are already occupied by her friends, but some of the smaller ones have a delightful exposure, and she will see that you have a special one with a bay window, which will give you a fine view.

We will look for you, if the day is fair, on Thursday or Saturday, as you decide.

Yours affectionately,

MARIAN D. ORMESBY.

"Poor thing! she's always been accustomed to the North room," said Mrs. Ormesby.

"Couldn't a couple of us crowd into a small room, just for the short time she is to be here?" suggested Edith.

"Not easily; they are built for only one person, besides, this is an off year, you see, and Aunt Henrietta must expect changes. If we were really interfering with her comfort, it would be different," added Helen, "I

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wouldn't do that for the world, but the room I speak of is very pretty and cozy. Now, Mummie, I know you are about to say 'it's too late to teach old dogs new tricks,' but—don't be rude; the change of rooms won't keep Aunt Henrietta away; send the letter on your very best paper, and see if I'm not right."

So the letter was written and sent, and the tardy sun came out brilliantly during the few days which intervened between Miss Henrietta's note and her coming. It was a beautiful sun, in spite of his uncertain behavior during the last few days, and the bare, brown earth grew warm under his kindly rays. Little patches of ice and snow, which had lain hidden in the shadow, melted away once and for all, and the frosty strength of winter was broken. There were still, sharp mornings when the girls left their warm beds reluctantly, and the nights were cold enough to cluster with great delight around the fire, but the body of the day was warm with palpitating life, and these girls, in their springtime, responded blithely.

As Helen predicted, Miss Henrietta had haughtily accepted the invitation, and had planned to come the following Saturday.

"A bad day!" exclaimed Helen. "And yet perhaps it's as well she should see the worst of us, for it's market-day, and the children and Rita are coming out for the week-end, and Fred and the Prince, later."

"And my broncos are coming in the cattle car," put in Ruth, "so she'll be treated to a Wild West show, probably at the very station."

"Don't frighten her, Ruth," said Mrs. Ormesby anxiously.

"Indeed, no; besides, my little ponies are as gentle as lambs, but they've been shut up so long in the city stables, that a whiff of the fresh open air may go to

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their heads. However, I'll be on hand with my lariat, and John won't have a bit of trouble."

"Have you a lariat here? I never saw one," said Sylvia curiously.

"Yes, coiled up like a snake at the bottom of my trunk. I've been too busy even to remember it, until just this minute, and I have a khaki riding suit too, which I shall don to enhance the picture."

"We'd all better turn out to welcome the old lady," said Helen, "there's strength in numbers, and if you, Mummie, are waiting in the background, with a comfortable carriage, Aunt Henrietta will overlook a great deal."

"Are we to be forever excusing ourselves to this formidable lady?" asked Ruth, with menace in her eye.

Helen laughed. "I'm afraid that will be *your* rôle when she sees you and the ponies."

Ruth tilted her chin, a way she had when breathing defiance. "Perhaps she'll be riding one of the ponies before she leaves the Farm."

"Not unless you knock her unconscious and bind her on; and remember, girls, as Mother said, Aunt Henrietta must be taken with a pinch of salt. It's her code to believe every one guilty till they are proved innocent, so her first impression of us will count for nothing."

It was a brilliant afternoon on the eventful Saturday, and the "Seven" were at the little flag-station in full force. They had tramped through the woods in their short skirts and sweaters, and the air had sent a glow to their cheeks. Ruth was in full regalia, even to the drooping sombrero and broad leather belt and high riding-boots, against which the spurs jingled as she walked.

"Will and Kitty will go wild over your rig," said Elsie, who admired her room-mate immensely.

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"Wait till I show them a few stunts on the ponies. Dear me, I feel as excited as a whole circus," and Ruth snapped the short whip she carried, and shifted her lariat from one shoulder to the other. "I should never dare to ride as fast here as I do on the prairies at home. Imagine a great stretch of almost endless plain, and me atop of a mettlesome young pony. I pull the rein, and he lays back his ears, I touch him lightly on the flanks with the very point of my spurs, and we're off like the wind—Oh, but it's great—that feeling of flying through the world! We couldn't do it here; we'd buck into a tree or something and down we'd go."

"Pegasus is always handy," suggested Edith slyly.

"That animal is hard to mount. I fall off before I get on," she admitted whimsically. "I'm sure of myself on a bare-back."

"I know the feeling," said Helen, "we'll have many a ride. Ruth, I think I should love your little broncos. I ride our own horses a great deal out here, but always with John or Jerry trotting behind. There's the train, now for the fun, and there comes the carriage sweeping down the road, with Mummie in it like a royal princess."

"And there comes Fred in the market wagon," cried Sylvia, "just in time to help with the trunks and give us a lift home." She pointed to the winding road on the other side of the little station, over which the sturdy grays were pulling the gay wagon at top speed.

"What a dramatic entrance Aunt Henrietta will make!" said Helen. "Draw up in line, girls, we must impress her, whatever we do."

She had no time to say more; the train stopped with a snort, and one lonely, attenuated and elderly lady stepped gingerly to the platform; from the baggage car an equally lonely and more dilapidated trunk was dis-

gorged with a heart-rending thump, while a stampede from the extreme rear, caused Ruth to break ranks, with a glad little cry, and fly to the assistance of John, who had been detailed to bring the ponies out. They whinnied at sight of their young mistress, who had made frequent pilgrimages to the stables in town to see them, and Danny, the rough little black one, began to rear and prance in such an alarming manner, that the old lady, though separated from him by a distance of some thirty feet, gave a wild shriek and rushed at Helen.

"My dear, are those dreadful animals going to be quartered on your place? And that horrid little cowboy creature that flew past me just now, seems just as wild."

"How do you do, Aunt Henrietta," said Helen with dignity. "Don't be alarmed, that is my friend, Miss Edgerton, one of our 'Seven,' and there are the others," waving her hand genially over them. "There isn't a bit of use to tell you their names now; you wouldn't remember. You seem to be a trifle upset about those ponies; they belong to Ruth, and that is why she ran past you so quickly. She understands and can manage them better than John. See how she's quieting them, it's really wonderful."

"I don't want to see; training horses doesn't sound to me like a very girlish occupation," said Miss Darcy severely.

"She's quite as good at trimming hats, and she writes novels for a pastime," said Helen airily, "you mustn't judge us from mere externals, Auntie. Mother is waiting for you over there in the carriage," and Miss Darcy flew to her niece and the safety of the carriage, with more speed than dignity.

"Ah, Rita, where did you come from, and where are the kiddies?" cried Helen, turning toward her gladly.

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"They are coming in the wagon with the Prince. The conductor overlooked me when he was helping out the funny old lady, but he came back for me later. Who is she, Helen?"

"My respected great-aunt. She'll probably take a fancy to you, because you can sew and do things feminine; smooth and pat her down nicely for to-day, for Ruth seems to have raised every thorn and prickle; it was unfortunate that the ponies arrived on the same day, but we are no match for the fates. Come, there is a seat in the carriage for you beside Jerry. We're going to pile into the wagon, all but Ruth. Mercy on us, that little brown colt has bolted, right straight across the field, and there goes Ruth after him on the black—look at that—will you?" and the girls all wheeled round to watch the exciting scene, while faint shrieks from the carriage bore witness to Miss Henrietta's state of mind. On came little Brownie, his neck stretched forward, his ears laid back, and his four sturdy hoofs scattering the dust as they pounded along. All eyes turned to Ruth. She was riding easily and gracefully in true Western fashion, giving her horse the rein, and occasionally the spur, as he pursued the runaway, in long swinging strides.

"Watch me catch him!" she called to her comrades, as she whirled past the little station; she was gaining steadily, riding with the lariat coiled in one hand, her bridle in the other. Then suddenly there was a whizzing sound, the rope shot out and the noose slipped over the head of the astonished Brownie, who, thus jerked to a standstill, snorted defiance. The girls applauded from the platform, even Jerry stood up to see the race, but Miss Henrietta, leaning forward, pulled him by the coat-tails.

"Sit down, please," she commanded, in her sternest

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tones. "These horses will be bolting next; look at their ears. If your blessed father could see how you run things, Marian, he'd turn in his grave. I wonder at your allowing it."

"If you mean Jerry—" began Mrs. Ormesby.

"Oh, I mean everything, that rough-rider girl, and those skittish horses of hers—wild horses, too—careering over the place."

"Beggin' your pardon, Miss Darcy," said Jerry, turning round, "them horses isn't wild, Miss Ruth's just trained 'em to do tricks like a circus. They sure do know how to ride out West," and Jerry gazed with admiration at the girlish figure on the black horse, sharply silhouetted against the blue sky. Ruth had coiled the lariat until her captive's head was close to Danny's, and she brought the two horses at a gentle canter up to the little station.

"We've all had such a good time," she said, springing down and putting an arm around each shaggy neck. "Brownie was spoiling for a run, I knew, and a chase like that works off a lot of surplus energy. They'll both be quite gentle when they get to the stable. Were you frightened, Rita?"

"Oh, no, but the old lady was."

Ruth glanced at the severely straight and disapproving back which Miss Henrietta had turned upon her.

"I must go over and make my peace, and the sooner the better," she said decidedly. "Here, John, hold the ponies—Come, Rita, I'll use you as a flag of truce, perhaps she may smile upon me—who knows!"

But Miss Henrietta did not smile. She acknowledged the introduction stiffly, and extended two fingers.

"I trust I may *never* see such an exhibition again,"

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she remarked, when Ruth apologized for having frightened her.

"It *was* rather tame, I'll try and give you a better show next time," said that irrepressible young person, in her sweetest tones, as she settled Rita comfortably. "I was sorry not to be among the welcoming committee, Miss Darcy, but my ponies were getting restive, and I had to give them a run, or there'd been trouble. *Au revoir*, I will see you at the house. I'm going to ride Brownie and lead Danny; they are jealous of the least partiality," and Ruth turned away, while Jerry put the big bays into a trot.

The market-wagon was fast becoming something more than a gay speck in the distance, and by the time Ruth reached the others, the clamorous voices of the youngsters were borne to them. They were rummaging in the bottom of the wagon for stray apples or carrots or turnips, that had been left over from the day's deliveries. They had discovered the ponies the very first thing, and had been interested spectators of Ruth's exhibition.

"That was a jolly run you gave them!" cried Will, almost tumbling from the wagon before it had quite slowed up. "I say—but they are beauties; let me mount the black one, I can hold on by his mane. I'm not a bit afraid."

Ruth laughed. "Danny needs a formal introduction, otherwise you'd be over his head before you touched his back. He's docile enough with his friends, but he has to make your acquaintance in his own way, and Brownie follows Danny in all things. Feed him and pat him and rub his nose once in awhile, and he'll soon come round. Brownie likes the ladies best. Look how he's eying Kitty."

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"It's just the size of the apple she's carrying, that's attracting him," said Will contemptuously. "He's calculating how many bites it will make."

However that might be, Brownie certainly broke into a faint unmistakable whinny as Kitty came up to him, and submitted to her almost timid caress. Then he munched the pieces of apple she gave him and allowed her to hold his bridle while Ruth mounted, caught Danny's bridle in her hand, and cantered away. The children scampered back into the wagon, and the half-dozen girls piled in.

"Well, I'm glad that ordeal is over," said Helen, with a sigh of relief. "I assure you, girls, I've been dreaming of Aunt Henrietta and her coming, and really it turned out better than I expected; now if the dear old lady will only bow to the inevitable and accept things gracefully, all will be well."

"I can't fancy Miss Darcy bowing to anything, with that perpendicular back," said Edith.

"What makes her squint so and screw up her eyes?" asked Sylvia.

"She's horribly nearsighted and won't wear glasses. Mother says it's a matter of history that once she met a cow in the road, rubbing herself against a telegraph pole; she thought it was some acquaintance bowing to her, and bowed back courteously; it's been a family joke for ages. Hurry, Fred, I told Jerry to take the long road, so that we could get home before them; we're going to make a quick change and surprise the old lady. Ruth will be way ahead of us. Those ponies go like the wind. Did you get any orders for us in our new lines?"

Fred laughed and slapped his pockets. "Just you wait and see. I'll have to have a business conference with the 'Seven.' We're branching out in every direction. It's positively awful—I'll need an assistant before

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College closes, for I'm only good for Saturdays until vacation. Why, this gigantic place could become a regular business if it is run properly."

Helen's eyes gleamed. "We'll talk it over after tea-time. We'll assemble in the attic; it's the best place for a business conference. Now we are all for ceremonials; Aunt Henrietta has been scandalized enough for one day, she needs a cup of tea and some of our best cake to soothe her ruffled plumage."

And lo and behold! when Jerry, after discreet meanderings, at length pulled up before the broad portico, seven smiling girls, in pretty house gowns, showed themselves at the door to welcome the new arrival, and the old lady, peering with her near-sighted eyes, could find no trace of the little cow-boy figure that had darted past her but a short time before.

For a few moments she sat in frigid silence, while the girls chatted and flew around, making the great hall cozy for the afternoon tea. Once in awhile she put up her lorgnette when some bright sally drew forth a gentle gale of laughter; and when the children and the Prince joined the group, and Fred made his appearance, freshly washed and combed and curried, she gave a faint shudder and folded her thin hands with resignation. But she could not long resist the pleasant girlish voices humming around her, and when Ruth passed her a feathery bit of sponge cake, saying in her gentlest tones:

"Please try some, Miss Darcy, it is my own special make," she was not sure, but she thought she saw the grim lines of the old lady's mouth relax into the shadow of a smile. Later, the children having been lured into the open by the loan of Helen's kodak, and Miss Henrietta, in her most benign mood, left dozing by the fire, the girls slipped away to their rendezvous in the attic.

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It was a long, low place, piled with trunks and the usual array of discarded furniture and defunct portraits, but tidy Mrs. Dennison had not allowed the dust to get very thick over things. Helen's quick eye discovered a battered old desk—a very ancient desk indeed—propped up on three legs, in a far corner, and her mathematical soul rejoiced.

"Girls, this is to be our counting-room," she announced, "we will hold our conferences every Saturday, right here, when Fred turns in the cash and you turn in the accounts; it will be great fun."

"It seems like counting one's chickens before they're hatched," said Josephine, whose mind dwelt on poultry and eggs.

"Not at all, we can have immense orders for eggs while we are waiting for the incubators," said Ruth cheerfully. "I'm just crazy to see the little chicks come out. I'm so afraid they'll break through the shell at night and we'll miss it."

"I like an old settin' hen best," observed Elsie.

"She's not progressive, my dear," said Sylvia. "The modern up-to-date hen accomplishes much more when she's not kept at home brooding over her eggs—when they're out of the shell, she can mother an adopted family of any size and dimension."

"Miss Browne, this discourse is certainly not in your line," said Ruth severely. "You've been dipping into some of my books on poultry."

"They're fascinating," admitted Sylvia.

"Let me advise you to keep to your cows and your milk-pans," warned Helen.

"And curds and cream," put in Edith mildly. "We have our compensations."

"Here comes Fred!" cried the twins, as they heard

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the creak of his boots on the attic stairs, and the next moment he burst in among them, quite breathless.

"I had a narrow escape from the kids; they've been snapping their Kodak at me, until I don't believe I have a thought or a feeling not expressed in photography. Now, young ladies, you're in for it. See here," and he drew out his lists as he dusted a place on the floor, and sat down among them. "Every mother's daughter of Miss Helen's original customers wants butter and eggs and milk and cream. I didn't even mention chickens, because we're not speculating."

"In the bright lexicon of the incubator, there's no such word as fail," put in Helen.

"A chicken in the wagon is worth two in the shell," answered Fred in the same vein, "and for the flower orders—"

"Yes, yes!" cried the twins excitedly.

"You'll grow mere shadows attending to them. When people heard that the Ormesby conservatories were to be open to the public—well—they smothered me with orders. There were two cotillions planned on the spot, and I believe one couple decided suddenly on a wedding, just to see what white flowers you can supply. And Nabb, the florist, wants whatever surplus you have at the end of each week—and—and so forth. There's no end to the flowers. Vegetables are as usual, Miss Helen, 'they eat stiddy,' as Jerry says, but there's considerable smacking of lips over the spring supply and the coming strawberries."

"To say nothing of the orchard fruits if I can keep the small boys away—they climb up overnight, Jerry says, and steal the cherries, for instance."

"Shoot 'em," suggested Fred in his pleasant tones.

"No, not yet. I'll try some other way first; I have

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some ideas that may work. In the meantime I'll look around for an assistant for you, Fred, for I'm afraid even in vacation time, you'll find your hands too full. Girls, this business is bigger than I thought. Are you afraid to tackle it?"

"Afraid!" cried Ruth, to whom fear of any kind was unknown. "Just wait and see."

"All right then," said Fred, distributing his lists, "these are the orders for next Saturday. When that unknown savior, my assistant, comes on the scene, we'll make it twice a week. Now for the serious question: shall I turn the money into one universal lap, or shall I give each—each firm I might say—its own special earnings?"

"Oh, the universal lap for me," said Josephine. "I hate accounts. Helen is so good at that, you know."

"I'll be no universal lap for anybody," said Helen firmly. "You'll all keep your separate accounts and bring them to me every Saturday."

A groan showed the popular feeling, but the Chief held her ground.

"I have said!" she declared, holding up two fingers, like the famous Caliph of Bagdad, and the others felt that the fiat had gone forth.

CHAPTER XIV

AUNT HENRIETTA, I'm going on a tour of inspection, would you like to come?"

Helen looked in at the pretty room where Miss Henrietta sat knitting by the bay window. It was a beautiful day and the spring sunshine flooded the place.

"To inspect what?" inquired Miss Henrietta, lifting her head, and firing her question like a bullet.

"Well," said Helen dubiously, "you can take your choice. There are the incubators and a thousand little new chickens, and there's the dairy where Sylvia and Edith are skimming milk and churning butter, and in the conservatories I scarcely know what is going on. The twins are so busy they hardly have time to breathe in work hours. Then there's my strawberry patch, and the budding fruit-trees, and all my young lettuce and radishes are coming up—oh, the spring is wonderful out here!" cried the girl, in the exuberance of her youth and health.

"I find it chilly," said Old Age from the other side of the gulf, "and the draughts of this place send my rheumatism shooting up and down my back."

"Too bad," said Helen soothingly, "but out of doors there is no chink for a draught, and the fresh air will do you good—come."

"Where's your mother?"—another bullet.

"In town; there were several things to attend to, and Mother took the train, Jerry will drive her out later."

"Has the mail come?"—bullet number three.

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"Oh, yes, long ago," said Helen imperturbably, "but really, Aunt Henrietta, time presses, and I have to make my circuit. I don't want to leave you alone for so long."

"How far do you have to go?"

"Only about three or four miles; the exercise will do you good."

"Mercy, child, I'd be in my grave after a tramp like that. Even when I was younger I wasn't what one might call a pedestrian."

"Auntie, did you think I was going to make you walk!" exclaimed Helen, breaking into an infectious laugh. "No wonder you jumped on me."

"Helen—" Miss Darcy's needles clicked together at the final stitch on the row, and she laid her knitting in her lap, "I am very much disappointed at the result of what is called higher education. Of course I know that your last remark was merely a modern figure of speech—"

"Real slang, ma'am, I own up," said Helen contritely.

"As a matter of fact," pursued Miss Darcy, "I never 'jumped' on anything or anybody in my life, I sometimes set my foot down peremptorily."

"That's what I meant," said Helen humbly. "You remember the old song which goes—'When the coster isn't jumping on his Mother'—I never really believed that the coster actually *did* jump on his mother with both feet you know; he only used one foot figuratively, as you describe," she added, without the suspicion of a smile. Near-sighted Miss Henrietta missed the mischievous gleam in the brown eyes, and accepted the apology, while Helen added: "I told John to bring the phaeton round."

"That's a different matter," said the old lady briskly,

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folding up her work, and five minutes later the staid old horse, specially selected for the occasion, was taking them over the well-kept roads, for which the Ormesby estate was famous.

Miss Henrietta, much mollified at this special provision for her comfort, unbent visibly. Helen drove her down the beautiful avenue of poplars, the pride and delight of the Ormesby family. The tall, straight trees, looking like soldiers on guard, stood very close together on either side of the road, so in many instances their topmost branches interlaced. The air was full of indescribable spring odors, and the well-kept lawns were pale emerald with the tender blades of grass. The old lady was unusually silent, but Helen chatted on, pointing out this or that improvement. Finally they turned into a little lane, leading by a short-cut to the domain of the poultry. It was feeding-time and they could hear the peeping of the chickens and the clucking of the hens' and Ruth's professional "Here, chick, chick, chick, here chick!" long before they really reached the inclosure.

"That sounds familiar," observed Miss Henrietta. "I suppose it is the only thing about chicken-raising that is as it was in my time."

"Yes, they get hungry in just the good old way, and answer the same old call. I daresay the thoroughly up-to-date chickens could be trained to come at the sound of a bell. We get out here," Helen added, as they stopped before a low wire gate, visible because newly whitewashed. Jumping out, she fastened the old horse, for ceremony's sake, to a convenient post, and helped Miss Henrietta to alight.

"Take care of your skirts, Auntie," she cautioned, "the little chicks are sprawling over the place, and have a way of getting under one's feet. Look over there!

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Doesn't it seem as if snow had fallen," Helen pointed to a downy group of little white snow-balls.

The old lady lifted her skirts gingerly and looked about her, disapprovingly. "It seems to me a reckless waste of money to provide for chickens, mere chickens, in this royal manner," she said. "In my day, a few box-coops and a wire fence, to keep off intruders, produced quite a fair supply of poultry."

"Yes, but you weren't making it a business," said Helen. "The incubators turn out a brood every few weeks, and we must have a well-ordered place to keep them in. It looks like a toy village, doesn't it? See Ruth sitting over there, the presiding genius of a hen party."

Ruth looked up at sound of their voices; she was surrounded by the beautiful white hens, with a few expectant cocks on the outer edge, and some smaller and very evident "broilers" pecking vigorously in front.

"Good morning," she nodded, "I dare not get up; I'm trying to teach my family table manners. Josephine is egg-hunting—we take turns—she who feeds the chickens one day, leaves the eggs and the accounts to the other fellow. I love to feed chickens; it's always surprising to me where the food goes. They never take time to swallow, if you notice, they just peck and peck, and always want more—like *Oliver Twist*. I've come to the conclusion, Miss Henrietta, that the proper study of mankind, is chickens. Helen, there's a bench in that corner, your Aunt can inspect things more comfortably."

Helen pulled the bench out, and at the same moment, something odd in the appearance of the fledglings struck her. Ruth caught the glance and laughed into her puzzled face.

"No, they haven't rheumatism," she said, "though it looks that way." And it certainly did, for each right leg

was carefully bound with a piece of pink or blue ribbon. "It's only an object-lesson for Josephine," she explained. "She can't tell the hens from the roosters when they are young; and when the time comes for broilers, we can't afford to sacrifice posterity to ignorance, so the ladies are sporting the blue ribbon, and the gentlemen the pink."

Miss Henrietta smiled in spite of herself, the girls had more than once brought a smile to the rather stern face.

"You see," went on Ruth, "all my knowledge was gleaned on the ranch. I'm a splendid out-of-door hand, I think seriously of adopting cattle-raising as my profession."

"Indeed!" said Miss Darcy frigidly, unaware of the laughter in the eyes behind the glasses.

"Don't you believe her, Auntie!" cried Helen, rushing to the rescue, for Miss Henrietta always translated literally. "There comes Josephine with her basket of eggs," she added, adroitly veering from the dangerous topic, for Miss Henrietta always shied at Ruth's daring remarks. "How many this morning?" she called.

"Ten dozen; we expect to double the supply when the young hens begin to lay; we'll do a driving business by midsummer." Josephine took off the broad hat she wore, and fanned her heated face. "I've been almost standing on my head to get these," she said, "and it pleased all the old hens to lay downstairs to-day. You see," she turned by way of explanation to Miss Henrietta, "the first hen sets the fashion. There are two stories to each of those little houses over there, and they are divided into small compartments. If the first hen lays her egg in the lower story, the others all follow, and no amount of persuasion will make them change their minds. That's

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what they did this morning, and to get the eggs requires the skill of an acrobat."

"Poor old Josephine! she can play her violin and soar, but she can't crawl, and there's so much of her to fold up when she goes down on all-fours," laughed Ruth.

"Never mind, I got the eggs anyway," said Josephine triumphantly. "Now I'm going to take them over to the dairy, where they'll keep cool till market-time."

"I have room in the phaeton for either the eggs or you," said Helen.

"The eggs, please, that will save my arms, and I can use my legs to better advantage. I'll beat you there. *Au revoir*," and Miss Henrietta gave a little gasp of surprise as dignified Josephine took a hand-spring over the low fence, and went whistling tunefully down the road.

"And you say her people are *the* Ashtons of Philadelphia? Some of their blue-blood ancestors would turn in their graves if they could have seen and heard *that*!" The old lady waved her hand in the direction of the vanishing Josephine.

Helen laughed merrily. "Auntie, if all the shocked ancestors *did* turn in their graves, there'd be daily earthquakes. Josephine is just keeping herself limber; we all miss the gym."

"What—Who?"

"The gymnasium at College; there's hardly a boy's trick that we can't do."

"I'd be ashamed to own it," said Miss Henrietta severely.

"Why, it's one of the features of higher education," explained Ruth. "The coming generation of broad-shouldered girls will live much longer than the narrow-chested ladies of the past. You'd have made a splendid athlete, Miss Henrietta, if you had been trained early,"

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Ruth added, her head on one side, eying her visitor critically.

This was almost too much, Miss Henrietta rose impressively and gathered her skirts about her; she glanced sharply at Ruth, but that damsel, seemingly innocent of offence, was serenely distributing choice morsels to the waiting fowls. Helen turned away abruptly. Laughter was always very near the surface with her, and Ruth's relations with their visitor were a fearful tax upon her gravity. She was glad when they were safely in the phaeton, rolling along toward the dairy, the basket of eggs carefully bestowed at their feet.

"Your friend's manners are breezy, to say the least," began Miss Henrietta after a few moment's silence.

"Ruth? Oh, she's all right, a perfect trump when you really know her, and what she said was true after all. If you had swung dumb-bells and taken high jumps, as a girl, you wouldn't have had so much rheumatism now."

"Humph!" grunted the old lady, "and that Ashton girl whistled too. Did you learn whistling in the gymnasium?"

"No, Josephine's our only genius, she's a regular blackbird. There's the dairy. Isn't it lovely, amid all those green trees?"

"It looks like a Grecian temple," said the old lady. "Your father always did have extravagant ideas."

"He certainly believes in beauty," said Helen. "Wait until you see the inside, it's really wonderful."

And truly it was, for even Miss Henrietta forgot to be critical. The whiteness of everything, with the hint of pale blue in the tiling, the marble slabs, the porcelain sinks and refrigerator, the burnished faucets, the imposing array of pails and cans and bowls and bottles, and

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the white churn in the corner, could not fail to impress even the uninitiated with the coolness and the cleanliness of it all. Edith, presiding at the churn, was a picture in her white mob cap and her blue gown, while Sylvia was busy bottling her milk supply and separating the cream.

"Look at that list," she announced, holding it up to Josephine, who was sitting on one of the spotless benches, refreshing herself with a glass of milk. "I don't believe the Ormesbys have enough cows to supply the demand. Good morning!" she called, as Helen and Miss Darcy appeared in the classic doorway. "I wish your incubator turned out cows instead of chickens; we need half-a-dozen more for business."

"You'd better speak to Jerry about it," said Helen gravely; "he might be able to buy a couple of Alderneys. Would that tide us over? there are several fine ones on the next farm, and the people will be willing to sell, I think. Where is the list?"

The next moment the two were deep in a business discussion and Miss Henrietta turned toward Edith and her churn, with a relieved sigh. Here was something at least feminine. Priscilla at her spinning-wheel could not be simpler or more winning, and it was an established fact in the household, that Edith was first favorite with this exacting old person.

"I don't know what it is about you," said Sylvia when they were talking it over, "except that you have a way of adapting yourself to the situation and giving to the smallest thing the spiritual 'tone' which belongs exclusively to the angels. To see you churn, for instance, one would imagine you were saint somebody or other, making butter for the poor, you seem so glorified. It quite hoodwinks Miss Henrietta."



“Priscilla at her spinning-wheel could not be simpler or more winning.”

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And so it was now ; Edith looked up with that welcoming smile which lent added beauty to the flower face, and explained all the intricacies of the modern churn, while poor Josephine, feeling that for some undefinable reason she had been sent to Coventry, packed her supply of eggs into the refrigerator and departed, waving her empty basket in farewell.

The conservatory was humming with business as Helen and her guest drove up. Elsie and Alice were flying about like distracted butterflies amid a riotous wealth of sweetness and beauty. Mary and Phyllis had both been pressed into service, and John, at the moment of their arrival, was staggering in at the door, laden with a mass of feathery foliage.

"I never saw anything like the orders for this week," explained Alice, as she greeted the visitors. "There are two weddings, five dinner-parties and a ball, to say nothing of smaller things."

"How about the flowers—will they hold out?" asked Helen anxiously.

"Why from day to day, one could not tell they had been picked. Elsie and I do all our own cutting, and we get a basketful before breakfast each morning, I never imagined such profusion. Even down home there is neither the skill nor the money to produce such loveliness. I'm so glad we were chosen for this job; it's a never-ending joy."

"Only we hadn't hands enough," said Elsie, "until Mary and Phyllis offered to help us. How do you like us as workers, Miss Henrietta?"

The old lady gave a short laugh. "This is a novelty; if you *had* to do it, you probably wouldn't like it as much; 'new brooms sweep clean,' " she added sententiously.

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"But we're not new brooms, and we've been sweeping pretty steadily for six months," put in Helen.

"Oh, well, in *my* day, *we* were educated in the domestic arts too, but not—not this way," with a meaning glance at the two servants. "We took our rightful places as mistresses in our households, and didn't play at being something else."

Helen was ordinarily a very good-tempered girl, but this was too much; the color flamed in her cheeks, and there was the light of battle in her eye.

"We are not playing, Aunt Henrietta," she said, in a curiously low tone—the twins glanced at each other; only on the rarest occasions had the Chief's rage boiled over, it was at the boiling point now, and her two lieutenants rushed gallantly to the rescue.

"Nowadays everything is done so scientifically," said Alice, "that I doubt if our grandmothers could fit the old time housekeeping to modern needs; modern girls are educated very differently."

"A girl is a girl all the world over, whether she is ancient or modern," said the old lady tartly.

"One might say the same of flowers," answered Elsie, lifting a beautiful white rosebud from its nest of green. "We liked the sweet old-fashioned roses that were plucked one hour and died the next; this is the same flower, but it grows in different soil and is hardier. Let me pin it on for you; it will last during the rest of your drive, and if you put it in water when you get home, it will be a lovely open flower in the morning."

She tied it loosely as she spoke, with a spray of maiden-hair fern and a sprig of mignonette, and bending, fastened it with careless grace upon the austere bosom. By the time this little ceremony was accomplished, Helen had herself well in hand, and while Elsie, who had con-

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stituted herself general peacemaker, did the honors of the place, Helen turned to Alice, with a provoked smile.

"I nearly lost my temper, didn't I? But all the same when we are doing such good, honest work, I hate to hear it laughed at. Mummie says she can remember quite distinctly when Aunt Henrietta took charge of their own motherless household, what a time they had until she was old enough to take the reins. Poor Grandfather! he was a peace-loving man, so he let things go. Considering what a bad housekeeper she was, it was rather poor taste to preach on the domestic accomplishments of the girls of her day."

"It reminds me of a lady Mother once met," said Alice. "She had beautiful ideas about the bringing up of girls, and discoursed so poetically about them, that Mother innocently inquired how many daughters she had. 'Five boys,' she answered promptly."

Helen's laugh rang out merrily, and the cloud was gone by the time the others came back.

"I'm going to take you through the orchard, Aunt Henrietta. That's my domain, with the strawberry patch on one side and the vegetable garden on the other. I want a word or two with Jerry; then we'll drive home by the highway, if you don't mind."

They found Jerry among the strawberry beds, bending over the flourishing young plants, and handling the green leaves as if they were living things.

"They're comin' on fine, Miss Helen," he said, touching his cap to the ladies. "By the end of May, you'll have prize berries."

"And the orchard?"

"I've got my men out there to-day, Miss. You'll maybe have fine cherries and peaches and pears, though there's no tellin'," and Jerry shook his head. "If we

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can only get over blossomin' time without them boys! I wish I could have a spring trap and catch 'em by the noses—just one or two," he added savagely.

"Why, Jerry!" said Miss Henrietta reprovingly.

"Yes, ma'am, that's what I wish; a tweak on the ear ain't no good; a boy can skin up a cherry-tree after he wrenches loose from me, but a trap's a different thing. You think it over, Miss Helen," and Jerry winked good-naturedly at his young mistress, being a privileged character.

"Helen!" gasped Miss Henrietta, "does Will—does your father allow such cruelty on his place?"

"We have to employ stringent measures, Auntie," said Helen soberly, "but I'll consider about the traps—one's nose is a very tender feature. I may be able to catch them some other way. There's quite a band of them, isn't there?"

"Yes, ma'am, an' there's Satan himself at the head, Jimmy Doyle has just growed up wrigglin' out of the grasp of the law. His mother's a God-fearin' woman; she lives a piece down the road, an' Bridget has her in oncet in awhile for a day's help. She was talkin' about Jimmy only last week. She says she has a hard time patchin' his trousers—they're always tore from climbin' other folks' trees, and she always has to put three or four thicknesses of cloth, because he gits such a terrible lot of canin' from the hoppin' mad farmers around here, an' it's him that leads the whole gang. I ain't never caught him yet—he's so slick—but when I do—" Jerry's unfinished sentence conveyed volumes.

"Isn't Jimmy the tall boy with red hair that I meet tramping down the road sometimes?" asked Helen curiously.

"Yes, Miss, that's the chap, you could see that red

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head of his a mile off, an' when you do come up with him, he's walkin' innocentlike, as if he hadn't a thought beyond his Sunday-school lesson."

"Maybe I'll meet him sometime—I'd like to," said Helen.

"I'm not wishin' you that bad luck, Miss Helen, but if you do, take Dorcas along. She's acquainted with Jimmy's shins. He was meddlin' with her family last fall, and he got more than he bargained for," said Jerry chuckling.

"Why don't you have him arrested?" put in Miss Henrietta.

"It ain't like it is in the city, ma'am; them as would spank Jimmy with all the pleasure in life, wouldn't call in the police, an' they'd turn on them as did. It'll have to be the trap, I'm thinkin'."

"I trust not," said Miss Darcy, "or I should have to report *you* to the police. Drive on, Helen," and as they wound slowly among the blossoming apple-trees that guarded the orchard, she added, in her severest tone: "Your mother and father, between them, have ruined a good servant. Jerry is allowed too much license; he doesn't know his place."

Helen let the reins fall loosely and gave the horse her head. "Aunt Henrietta," she said quietly but firmly, "I took you this morning upon what I thought would be a pleasant expedition, and stood by, while you found fault with my friends, but when it comes to criticising my father and mother, I'm afraid we shall quarrel. As for Jerry, he is too faithful and too devoted to our interests to be spoiled by any amount of indulgence; we try to be kind to all of our servants."

"Kind!" cried the old lady, now thoroughly roused. "Why, you put yourselves on a level with them, by do-

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ing their work, actually receiving instructions from them, as if you were going out to service to-morrow."

"That was exactly our idea," said Helen. "We came from College a lot of unfledged, inexperienced girls, and we're learning to be useful as well as ornamental; we're learning to put ourselves in our servants' places, so that one of these days, when we have homes and servants of our own, we shall never exact from them any service we would hesitate to do ourselves. You may consider that demeaning—"

"I certainly do; I could point out much—"

"Don't," said Helen, "it would be mere waste of breath, and if you would take my advice, Auntie, being a minority of one, you would keep your private opinion concerning the 'Seven' strictly private, for two reasons; one is, we are all very popular, and the other, you may change your point of view some day, and live to eat your words. Now, let's go home and eat something else," she added as they struck the highway, and the old horse pricked up her ears.

There were two miles of straight driving, and it was along this road that Helen half-expected to see the shock red head of Jimmy Doyle looming up at any moment, for his mother's unpretentious, whitewashed cottage stood in a shady cross-way, not far off. She was not mistaken; at the first bend of the road she discovered him sitting on a fallen log, whittling a long piece of wood for dear life, and whistling a blithe accompaniment. Jerry's description was too graphic to avoid recognizing the arch-culprit. Miss Henrietta straightened up and grasped Helen's arm.

"There's that boy," she whispered.

Helen nodded and slowed up as the bent head was lifted at the sound of the crunching wheels; she saw a

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freckled face with keen, good-humored blue eyes, and a mouth that seemed to stretch from ear to ear. She beckoned, and he came forward, grinning sheepishly.

"Can you tell me where Mrs. Doyle lives?" she asked, smiling upon the lanky youth, who stood bashfully twisting his cap.

"That's her place," he said, pointing with a smudgy forefinger to where the cottage nestled behind a clump of trees. "I guess she's ter hum."

"Thank you, I just want to speak to her," and Helen drove on, well aware that Master Jimmy had doubled his tracks and would probably be hiding within earshot when she spoke to his mother.

Mrs. Doyle was at her door as Helen turned in at her gate. "I seen you comin' up the road, Miss, an' I thought mebbe you an' the lady would step out awhile."

"No, not just now," said Helen; "we're in a hurry to get home. I am Miss Ormesby, of the Farm. You are Mrs. Doyle, aren't you?"

"Yes, ma'am, is anything wrong?" The poor woman looked thin and worried, and there was a restless, hunted look in her eyes. "Is it Jimmy again, ma'am? I've been afeard he's been up to somethin'—he's been so quiet."

"If Jimmy is your son," said Helen innocently, "he's the very person I'd like to know. Our coachman tells me he's quite a leader among the country boys around here, and I'd like to get his help; perhaps, if he isn't at home, you'll ask him to call at the Farm to-morrow."

"Yes, ma'am," began Mrs. Doyle, but the red head of her son suddenly bobbed into view from the rear of the cottage.

"I beat you here, walkin'," he said; "that old hoss

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ain't no good. I didn't know 'twas me you wanted. You asked fur Ma."

"I thought perhaps you were at school."

Jimmy grinned. "I was, this mornin', but it got too warm, so I scooted. I can learn better outside, I guess."

"Jimmy," said Helen, bending over confidentially, in spite of warning punches from Miss Henrietta, "I'm hunting for just such a boy as you are—would you like to work for me? I'll pay you good wages."

Jimmy looked her up and down, and his keen blue eyes studied her brown ones. "What are you givin' me?" he asked sarcastically.

"You mean how much money? I don't know yet, I must find out what you are worth." That was not, of course, what Jimmy meant, but he let it go at that.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"It's just this," said Helen, "and you're the only person who can really help me. I am Miss Ormesby; you know where our orchard is, don't you?"

"I guess so," he answered shortly, and again the blue eyes flashed defiance into the brown ones.

"Well, Jerry, our man, tells me that every year, just at the very worst time, the trees have been robbed, and I cannot help thinking that in summer, with a lot of idle boys around, the fruit doesn't have half a chance. I have heard that you are a great leader out here," Helen smiled insinuatingly.

"The girl guessed right the very first time," said modest Jimmy.

"And I thought if you'd take the job of guarding the orchard and keeping off the thieves, we'd have a crop of cherries and apples and pears, and even peaches later on, that would be the talk of the country."

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"You sure would," he echoed, his grin spreading over the irony of it.

"And if," pursued Helen, "you could get several of your particular friends to join with you, you could form a regular patrol, and I'd supply you with caps and badges."

"Humph!" grunted Jimmy.

"If you belonged to the Ormesby Guard, for instance, there's no end to the fun you could have, and you could have all the fruit you wanted later on. Think it over, and let me know. I'll get one of my friends to design the badge, and I'll buy the caps in New York. Good-by, let me hear soon," and Helen left the gaping and astonished Jimmy staring after her, in the middle of the road.

"I wish you could have seen his face, Mummie," she laughed, when she described the scene. "It was a study in freckles, believe me; we've saved the fruit this season. Aunt Henrietta, Jerry won't need a trap—Jimmy's nose is safe."

And she was not mistaken; two days later, a deputation, headed by Jimmy, interviewed the "Seven." The place of meeting was the orchard, and John had laid a tempting tea-table in the shade of a gnarled old apple-tree. The afternoon was balmy and springlike, and the girls made a charming picture as they sat around on the camp-stools they had brought out for the occasion. It was an imposing array, and the three country lads looked very sheepish as they approached the conference from the back lot; even Jimmy, the Audacious, was too dazzled for a moment to speak. He took a hurried survey of the fascinating group, including the tea-table with its tempting cakes and a large glass pitcher of lemonade.

"We're here about them badges," he said briefly and

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to the point, his bold eye singling out Helen from the others.

"Then you've decided to take the job?" she asked.

"You bet! How about them caps?"

"You shall have them."

"And these fellows wants stripes on their pants like the real cops."

Helen turned to her mates. She was quite sober, but laughter hid in her eyes.

"That wasn't stipulated in the bond," she said. "Do you think we could let them have stripes?"

Ruth looked sternly over her glasses at the deputation, which stood first on the right foot then on the left.

"The policemen have stripes as rewards for bravery. The Ormesby Guard will have to work for those."

"Them sort of stripes comes on their sleeves and their collars and their shoulders, Miss," said Jimmy; "on pants there ain't nothin' to it but style."

A suppressed titter came from the twins, but the Chief glared at them warningly.

"Well," she said, "I think we *might* promise the stripes, but what are you going to promise on your side?"

"To see your fruit ain't swiped, an' to nab them as tries to. There's a lot of rough kids around these parts—maybe we three could tame 'em an' make 'em join the Guards. You could get up a dandy company," and the new play seemed to take hold of the irrepressible Jimmy.

"That's not a bad idea," said Sylvia, whose two brothers belonged to a crack regiment; "then you can have drills, you know. It's lots of fun."

"An' mebbe guns," said Jimmy.

"Never!" said Helen firmly, "the most I'll allow

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will be whistles. In a week your outfit will be ready. Here is a picture of the silver badges I'm going to have made," and she unfolded Sylvia's clever little sketch of an apple-tree, surrounded and guarded by a band of the faithful.

"Boys, are you thirsty?" asked Edith, flitting like a blue-robed angel toward the pitcher of lemonade.

An eloquent gurgle answered her, and ten minutes later, when the nucleus of the Ormesby Guard took its leave, they had left nothing behind them in the way of refreshments but the empty glasses, the pitcher, and three plates.

Before the week had expired the Ormesby Guard had increased to a round dozen, and Helen was the recipient of many funny little notes from the neighboring farmers, who were quick to appreciate the humor of the situation.

"There comes a time," one of them wrote, "when spankin' can't touch a tough hide—that's the time for cakes an' lemonade. Thank you, ma'am; we farmers feel like sendin' a lovin'-cup to Ormesby Farm."

So the "Seven," with free minds, could contemplate a luscious fruit crop, and presently the countryside was pervaded by the Ormesby Guard, resplendant with "stripes" and white caps and silver badges, while the days lengthened into the promise of summer, and the unmolested cherries—the first among the newcomers—hung ripe upon the trees.

Life, indeed, fairly hummed upon the big estate. The warmer days brought early rising, and many a fair morning saw them all abroad, long before breakfast. Lizzie was through with her milking by six o'clock, and by half-past six she was surrounded by a merry group, demanding their early glass of milk. By seven Ann's

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assistant was on her way to the kitchen, but the others stayed in the open, for the outside work was daily demanding more time and attention.

"There's no use talkin', Miss Helen!" declared Jerry. "Mr. Fred needs help—he can't do this job by himself any more, an' besides, your wagon ain't big enough for all the extras you're puttin' on the market; you need another for the butter an' the eggs an' the milk an' cream, to say nothin' of the flowers."

"I know," said Helen, "the wagon is an easy proposition. To find a reliable man is the question, and a hard one, too."

But it was answered in an unexpected way by a letter from Hugh.

DEAR LITTLE MUM:

I wonder if you could be bothered with a boarder this summer? The ship's surgeon says I've got malaria in my system—whatever that may be—and I must clear out of South American waters, so I'm ordered home on sick leave until the ship strikes the Atlantic again. Don't be worried. I'm not even emaciated, so don't open your fountains of pity. If it wasn't for feverish nights occasionally, and a queer, light feeling in my head sometimes, you couldn't tell me from the same old Hugh. Wire if there's room for me.

This note was read with varying emotions. Mrs. Ormesby was anxious and wired at once; the girls were full of expectancy; a man once more among them would give zest to the whole day's work. Josephine looked radiant; even Miss Henrietta brightened visibly, for Hugh was a great favorite with her, while Helen suddenly exclaimed with rapture:

"Allah be praised! the good, reliable man to help Fred has been found at last—even my own and only brother! He can't come home too soon."

CHAPTER XV

WHO is going to the station with me?" asked Helen, pausing in the doorway. The girls were all assembled in Josephine's and Alice's room, and were lounging luxuriously, for the day's labors were over, and the heat had touched even the hilltop.

"How nice you look!" said Ruth; "that white embroidered linen's a success, Helen."

"Isn't it? I'm rather proud of it myself. Why don't some of you dress and come along?"

"Too lazy," said Sylvia, yawning over her book; "I fain would sleep. Playing 'early bird' on summer morning brings on a severe attack of drowsiness just at this hour."

"My dear girl, this is Thursday, and the accounts must be made up by Saturday, you know," said Josephine from her desk, where she was bending over a pile of papers.

"And she *must* practice at six sharp; that's the time the teamsters get home, and music is a wonderful cure for malaria. I have it on the very best authority," said Ruth wickedly. "Don't look at me in that imploring way. I wouldn't exchange the present comfort of this voluminous kimona for the handsomest gown in my wardrobe—go thy ways—go thy ways."

"How about you, Edith?"

"I promised Miss Henrietta to read her a story; she depends upon it for her afternoon nap. We've been on

one everlasting tale for a week; she 'falls off' in exactly the same place each day, and I have to begin it over the next."

"And we must write our weekly letter home," said Alice with decision.

"But Mr. Trent will think it so strange," persisted Helen.

"Surely you have tact enough to explain our delinquencies," laughed Ruth, "that is, if they are questioned. I'd like to wager, that to a tired young man just released from the thralldom of College routine, the sight of our beloved Chief, in that bewitching hat and gown, to say nothing of the shoes and the sunshade, will be enough to drive away even polite inquiries about the rest of us."

A faint pink stole through the tan of Helen's cheeks. She gave a quick glance around the room. "And so you'll all desert me?" she asked.

"Don't call it desertion," begged Sylvia, "that's such a hard, cold word."

"And if you're really lonely, take the Prince for escort," suggested Josephine. "You'll find him enjoying his *siesta* on our veranda; he prefers it to Lizzie's humble little porch."

Helen shrugged her shoulders helplessly, and half wished she had ordered the phaeton; but there was no time to lose if she wished to meet the five-thirty train, so she made a dignified retreat, stopping on her way downstairs for a peep into her mother's room.

"Not a soul would come with me, Mummie; they're in all stages of laziness upstairs. I shall have to take the Prince in self-defence."

"And put this letter in the mail-bag on your way downstairs," said her mother, sealing and stamping it as

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she spoke, and handing Helen her weekly budget to her husband. "I'm getting tired of this sort of thing," she added; "we've never been separated in all our married life before."

"And if it hadn't been for our troublesome 'Seven' you'd have crossed with him—now, wouldn't you? Poor little Mummie! Never mind, you're serving your country, anyway; that should comfort you, and Hugh is home—and—and—"

"And I have my girl," smiled Mrs. Ormesby, though her eyes were misty. "Now, run along, we mustn't let our guest arrive without a word of welcome."

"It was good of you to ask him here, Mummie, he's so lonely, poor fellow."

"Yes, he *is* lonely, and as we had taken Rita, it seemed unkind to shut him out—I like him, too," said Mrs. Ormesby heartily. "Go on, dear, you really *will* be late, I'm afraid."

Helen called the Prince as she ran blithely down the steps. He wagged his tail and opened his sleepy eyes; like Sylvia, the summer languor was upon him and he fain would sleep, but Helen was peremptory; in vain he tried to be polite and acknowledge her presence; she persistently demanded his company—well, if it must be, it must. He dragged himself off of the veranda and crawled down the steps just half awake, but by the time he had touched the gravel walk his puppy mind pushed forward to a frolic, and he scampered ahead, looking back once in awhile to make sure that Helen was following.

For a moment Philip Trent stood alone on the tiny porch of the little station, a faint chill of disappointment creeping over him. He had never been to the Farm before, but somehow in picturing his arrival there

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Helen's girlish figure and her smile of welcome had always occupied the foreground on his mental canvas. But even as the shadow crossed his face, as his eye swept the wide horizon of blue sky and green woods, he saw coming toward him, like a nymph from the heart of the forest, Helen in the flesh, sweet and wholesome, atune to the wholesome world about her. With a glad light in his eyes he caught up his suit-case and ran like a boy across the verdant fields to meet her half way.

"I feel as if I had been traveling on the famous 'Road of Anthracite' and was meeting 'Miss Phoebe Snow' for the first time," he said as he shook hands and looked admiringly at the dainty white figure.

"It is sheer force of will that has kept me spotless," said Helen laughing and pointing to her wriggling escort. "The Prince has been caricoling around me in a perfect ecstasy of admiration. I had to find a stick for him to carry, or I don't know where his affection would have landed him."

"And I have my suit-case to carry," said Philip gravely, whereat they both laughed, though Helen flushed to the little curls on her forehead.

"Now, tell me about yourself—all the history of the past three months," she began again.

"The regular humdrum history begins and ends here—for me." They were entering the cool, green shade of the woods as he spoke, though he was not looking at the beautiful wilderness about him, but into the soft brown eyes of the girl beside him. She grew a little restive under his gaze, so she dropped her own to the velvet turf at her feet. "If you could only know how I have hungered for a sight of—of—this lovely place," he finished valiantly. "It was good of your mother to ask me down."

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"It wasn't all goodness—we wanted you; we've all been working hard, you know."

"Yes, Rita kept me posted; the faithful child never missed a week, and one or two rare notes from headquarters gave me some idea," he said smiling.

"Those scrawls of mine couldn't tell much," apologized Helen. "I'm afraid," truthfully, "they were written as bait, with which to catch an answer. I suppose you have said 'good-by' to the College?"

"Yes, it was a wrench, but it had to come; it's not the life I'm cut out for, though coming to me as it did—during a stressful time—I grew to look upon it as a sort of anchor. Now that I've cut the cables and find myself in the open sea, I don't quite know what course to take. Time will determine that, or inclination, or more cogent than either—necessity. I have no intention of being a poor man if I can help myself."

"There are worse things than poverty," began Helen.

"Oh, I know all that can be said about the great army of deserving poor," he answered laughing. "I'm a private in the ranks myself, but I'm going to climb. There's a treasure I covet, and it is quite beyond my grasp; if I can find a ladder tall enough to reach it in the end, I don't care if I begin at the lowest rung. Now you know that Napoleon wasn't 'in it' when it comes to ambition, but I must go out in the world to conquer. I've felt that for a long time. I want to breathe while I work."

"I know what you mean," cried Helen, her enthusiasm kindled by his words. "There are different kinds of worlds for different kinds of men, I suppose."

"Of course, otherwise all ambitions would have to crowd on the same train, which would be inconvenient for the hustlers," he answered, following her lead and

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slipping into generalities. "Now, tell me about the Experiment—and all the others," he added perfunctorily.

Helen smiled, remembering Ruth's prophecy. "The 'Seven' have surpassed themselves," she said, "and our undertaking is no longer an experiment, it's a very self-evident and successful fact. Even Aunt Henrietta is beginning to have some respect for it. Ah—I forgot, you don't know Aunt Henrietta, but you shall, if you are good. She came as soon as we migrated here this spring, to pay her annual visit; she usually stays a month, and it was a lively month, you may believe, for Aunt Henrietta is given to speaking her mind. Did you ever have a maiden aunt?"

"No, but I've seen other people's; I know about them."

"But you don't know Aunt Henrietta; speaking her mind meant saying flatly all the disagreeable things she could think of; we never knew what to expect next—we 'Seven,' and yet there was something about the lonely old lady that was very appealing. The girls laughed at her sometimes, but in spite of it they felt as I did when they saw her packing up, preparatory to going back to the hot, dusty city and her little hall-room in the boarding-house, where she would stay for the rest of the summer. So we all met in secret session one night, and drew up a petition begging her to make the Farm her headquarters as long as she cared to stay. Well, you should have seen her face when Ruth presented it at the breakfast-table the next morning; she was completely taken by surprise. Poor Auntie! Very few people like her enough to invite her to visit them, much less to ask her to come again or to stay longer, and since then she's been angelic, for of course she stayed, and even she and Ruth can come together now without

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a clap of thunder. Fred Gayle and his two youngsters are at the cottage close by, where they were last summer. Rita we've tucked away among us in a cunning little cubby-hole just off of my room, and you're to share Hugh's—if you don't mind. His coming was unexpected or you would have been more comfortable."

"My only fear is that I am crowding you too much, and inconveniencing your brother," said Philip quickly.

Helen laughed. "Hugh is so accustomed to the inconvenience of a sailor's bunk, that an extra bed in the room will make no impression upon him."

"And your father—when will he return?"

"Soon, we're hoping; he writes very little about his mission, but he sounds cheerful, so we're trusting in the Ormesby luck, as our precious garnet is still in our possession. There! we are coming to a clearing and you can get your first view of the house. It's a quaint old home, and some of the timber in the lower story has undoubtedly seen Revolutionary days. The grounds slope away from it in the back, you see, down to the water's edge; we only get a piece of our river here, but it's a pretty bit, and navigable for a couple of miles at least. We have great sport on it winter and summer. If it hadn't been for my ridiculous ankle, we might have skated over it last season."

"How about boating?" inquired Philip.

"Ideal; some of us are always to be found there after duty hours, and we can serve you up the most glorious of sunsets reflected on the bosom of the waters. Whenever you feel bored, you can escape by the back way to the boathouse, where you'll be sure to find one of our three boats or the canoe. Fred used to practice out there when he was on the Columbia crew; the children and the Prince almost reside in a boat, his Royal

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Highness takes his daily bath in the river, and Will and Kitty are learning to swim like ducks."

"You have all the allurements of fairyland about here," said Philip, "no wonder you love it."

"I always call the Farm Daddy's favorite child. Look on the veranda—the reception committee has turned out in full force. I hope you're not very bashful, but it can't be helped for once."

"If I'm sure of your sympathy and support I can survive it," he said, half in jest; but there was no need for embarrassment. Mrs. Ormesby's gentle kindness and Hugh's hearty handshake put him quite at ease. Rita crept up to him, her welcome shining through her tears, and Philip put a brotherly arm about the slight figure, while he turned and greeted the others. Next he was wafted to the corner of the veranda and presented to Miss Henrietta with much ceremony, and then Hugh took his suit-case and piloted him to the pleasant room which they were to share, talking volubly the while.

"I hope you've brought overalls," he said. "On this place 'everybody works but Mother.' I was sent home, a yellow-faced specimen of South American malaria, and my little sister bought me a toy delivery wagon, devoted to butter and milk and eggs and chickens, and I'm the deliverer—so to speak. It's a nobby little affair—that wagon, and I drive a fast horse, so there's some compensation. As a reward of virtue, the great ones allow you to help them occasionally in their various branches. You can feed chickens, or stand on your head and hunt eggs; you can skim milk or churn butter; you can even cut flowers for the general welfare; but if you are to be under Helen's chaperonage, you'll really need overalls; she's a great one for digging and

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burrowing about her vegetables and fruits; she's up with the proverbial lark, and—so are the others. If it wasn't for a glorious dip in the river each morning, I'd let them whistle for *me* at that hour. Occasionally I can tempt one of them for a row before breakfast—then life's worth living," and Hugh smiled as one or two delicious memories came to him.

Indeed, life was well worth living at the Farm. The closer these busy girls got to Nature, the more they felt this. Philip Trent felt it, too, before he had been with them a week. There were long busy mornings out-of-doors; there was a drowsy hum of the afternoon, when the "Seven" hid themselves from view, and the three young men turned toward the river for a vigorous pull up stream, and perhaps a bit of fishing in some quiet pool, or smoking and dreaming under the trees.

When the teamsters were on duty, twice a week, Philip took Will and the Prince for company. It was on one of these occasions that the afternoon stillness was broken by the shrill whistle of Jimmy Doyle's patrol. The first roused Helen from the land of dreams into which she was fast sinking; then the sounds came from every quarter, and Helen, stepping out upon the tiny balcony outside of her window, saw the Ormesby Guard gathering from every direction, the silver badges on their white caps gleaming and flashing in the sunlight.

The girls came crowding into her room in various stages of dishevelment and bewilderment.

"What is it—and where?" asked Sylvia, excitedly stepping out on the balcony beside Helen.

"That first whistle was like the shot heard round the world," said Ruth, rubbing her eyes. "What's up, I wonder?"

"Some trouble in the orchard, I'm afraid," answered

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Helen, turning back into her room and beginning to make a hasty toilet. "I'm going to see."

"So shall I," declared Ruth; "wait for me, Helen. I won't be long, I *must* witness the honorable Jim's first capture," and five minutes later the two girls, bare-headed, but shaded by the umbrella that Helen had picked up, were hurrying across the wide expanse of lawn in the direction of the orchard, whence came the sound of loud and angry voices in every note of the boys' strident range, occasionally interlarded by a bark—a most familiar bark—and a thin, piping, excited treble, that Ruth recognized at once.

"That's Kitty's voice, and she sounds as mad as a hatter; the plot thickens—I bet Will's in trouble."

"He certainly can't be far away, with the Prince on the spot; the two went off with Mr. Trent right after luncheon," said Helen, as they turned an angle which brought the orchard into view. Here they encountered the most amazing and amusing picture.

Around the trunk of a large and spreading apple-tree, whose boughs were almost bent under the weight of the half-ripe fruit upon them, were clustered half-a-dozen of the Ormesby Guard, headed by Jimmy himself. On one side stood Kitty, her cheeks scarlet, her blue eyes ablaze with anger, while every stamp of her foot was a signal for the Prince to bark his loudest, and make little vicious snaps at sundry convenient shins. Seated comfortably on a cradlelike bough near the top of the tree, like the famous "rock-a-bye baby" in the lullaby, was Will, calmly munching apples to his heart's content, and throwing the hard cores, with deadly aim, upon the heads of his captors. He was the first to catch sight of the advancing rescue party, and he made a megaphone of his two hands.

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"If you don't hurry up," he called, "poor Kit will have apoplexy and the Prince will go into spasms."

The skirmishing party at the foot of the tree wheeled round, just as Helen and Ruth, quite breathless, arrived upon the scene. The Guard, mindful of etiquette, stood at attention and saluted. Kitty flew to them, letting loose her whole vocabulary in excited explanation that explained nothing.

Jimmy stepped forward, cap in hand. "I'm doin' me duty, Miss, me an' the boys; we've been watchin' the orchard pretty faithful, an' when I seen that chap up there, sneakin' around with the pup at his heels, sez I to meself, 'there's mischief,' an' I blowed my whistle. Before I'd blowed it three times he was clean up to the top of the tree, showin' he was used to the job, an' when the kids came a-troopin' up, there he was—as smilin' as a basket of chips—swipin' an' eatin' fur dear life, an' he just kep' on, too—by ginger!"

"Did you think I was coming down to be grabbed and handcuffed and carted to the stable?" roared Will from above. "Not on your life! and I won't stir a peg now, until the coast's clear. I'm having a very pleasant time; I may as well stay where I am. Have an apple?" he called, catching Ruth's eye and making a feint of throwing one.

"Stand aside, boys," said Helen to the Guard. "Come down, Will, we must thresh this out."

"Flag of truce—and no treason?" questioned the cautious captive. "I'm not to be nabbed the minute I reach the bottom?"

"There'll be a trial by jury," said Helen firmly. "Jimmy and his company were only doing their duty. If you can give satisfactory answers, you can go free, if not—"

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“Well?”

“You’ll have to pay a fine, that’s all; as it’s the first offence you wouldn’t have to go to prison, but I thought you knew that orders were *not* to climb the trees.”

“Yes, I knew, and I didn’t intend to—wait, I’ll come down and tell you.”

There was a scramble among the branches, and several beautiful apples fell to the ground. The Guard—to a man—made a sudden involuntary motion to pick them up, but duty conquered, and they stood erect and virtuous. Helen laughed.

“They were blown down to you, boys, you may as well have them,” and they needed no second bidding. They were standing at rest, enjoying the delight of the first luscious mouthful, when Will slid down the trunk of the tree with the ease of a monkey. Kitty uttered an ecstatic shriek and hung about his neck.

“The gallant Duke removed the clinging arms, and looked long into the lovely face of the Lady Katharine,” spouted the irrepressible Will, suiting the action to the word. “She’s been reading Sir Walter Scott,” he explained; “it’s bad for her in the summer.”

Helen gulped down an overwhelming desire to laugh. Kitty was so dramatic that Will was apt at times to be convulsing.

“Well,” she said, in her severest tone, “I’m waiting for the explanation.”

“You see, Mr. Trent and I were down in the little summer house by the river, and he asked me if I’d mind coming back for a certain book he’d forgotten to bring along. The Prince and I took a short cut through the orchard, intending to see if there were any apples on the ground, and the moment that fellow spied me he blew his whistle; he didn’t ask me a single question,

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but just kept blowing and blowing, and when I saw all those kids running at me like a set of wild bulls, and I heard that Jimmy Doyle say 'Here's some one tryin' to steal apples,' well—I just scooted up to my old perch where Kit and I used to come last summer, and as long as they had me treed I thought I might as well enjoy the apples; they're riper up top, you know, the sun gets a whack at them."

"But you knew climbing was forbidden," persisted Helen.

"Of course, I'm willing to pay any fine that's reasonable, but you didn't expect me to fight six boys 'ter oncet,' as Ann says. I could have downed any *one* of 'em easy, but I wasn't such a fool as to go it single-handed like the brave St. George or Sir What's-his-name, that Kitty reads about. No, sir; so up I got, and that's the story. What's to pay?" and Will ostentatiously jingled some coins in his trousers' pockets.

"Which would you rather do—work out your fine with me, or pay over to my faithful Guards whatever you have in your pockets?" asked Helen.

"Pay, every time. I'm on my vacation now," said Will, promptly pulling out the coins. "Gosh! I'm sorry I didn't buy those films yesterday; next pay day isn't till Saturday. Here, fellows, catch! there's a quarter apiece, even. The fair Katharine must support the noble Duke meanwhile. Come along, Prince, we'll get that book now," and Will departed. The Guards melted away, Kitty went back to her story-book on Lizzie's little porch, and Helen and Ruth sat down on the deserted battlefield and had their laugh out.

"If Kitty didn't adore Will so openly, and boxed his ears occasionally, it would do him good," said Ruth, wiping her eyes. "That's what I call a thrilling scene,

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even though a whole hour has been taken from the greatest novel of the age."

"Are you really writing it?" asked Helen curiously, as they sauntered slowly back to the house.

"Wait and see. Didn't I promise you that in five years' time it should be presented on a silver salver to the College library?"

"Five years! when you think what we are crowding into one, there's simply no calculating," said Helen. "I'm quite happy in the present, aren't you?"

"For the present, yes; but I've a restless ambition, and by the way, when are we to take that long-talked-of horseback ride? I've promised Fred that he might try one of the broncos, and I'm counting on you and Mr. Trent to join us. I wouldn't care to trust my frisky pets with more than four in party."

"I'm aching for a ride, but I hate to be selfish about it," began Helen.

"Good old Chief. Now, see here, somebody *has* to start the ball rolling, and there are not horses enough for everybody at one time. Nobody can manage the broncos unless I'm along, and you've promised Mr. Trent a ride. I'm sure he doesn't want a substitute as *his* companion. The early morning is a glorious time; suppose we go to-morrow just before sunrise?"

"I'll talk it over with Mummie, and if she thinks it all right, I'll tell Jerry to have the horses ready. Which horse is Fred to ride?"

"Danny. John's been trying both of them with a new saddle all this month, and they're pretty well broken. I shall ride Brownie, as usual."

"I think *we'll* take the blacks, they're splendid saddle horses," said Helen. "Oh, dear, I wish I hadn't a conscience!"

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"It's certainly too big for your size," said Ruth. "Josephine doesn't ask *you* to go boating with her in the early morning, does she? and she's never alone. The twins would thank you for nothing for rousing them in the early dawn, and I have inside information that Sylvia and Edith are going to take their first private milking lesson from Lizzie at dawn to-morrow. Fred let me into the secret; he thought—all things considered—that to-morrow would be the day of days."

"So Fred's at the bottom of it," laughed Helen.

"He's plagued the life out of me ever since the ponies came. Talk of boys—he's the smallest on the Farm; I told him to wait until after Commencement time, I wanted him to graduate properly, before he broke his head."

"Why, you don't think there's danger, do you?" asked Helen anxiously.

"Not when he gets the whip hand, but there's always a risk on first acquaintance, and Danny must know his master. Now, here we are at the house; tell your mother about it as soon as you can; not a soul must know, as Fred is stealing away from the Kiddies, and *do* put it through if you can."

Mrs. Ormesby, who had been a daring horsewoman in her day, fell in at once with the plan.

"I wish I were going with you," she said, "but years ago your father made me promise never to ride unless he was in the party, for I own I was reckless on one or two occasions, but I think, with Fred and Philip, you girls are safe."

Helen looked up quickly; it was seldom that her formal mother discarded the ceremonious title. Mrs. Ormesby caught the look and laughed somewhat bashfully. "You sharp child! I had to begin some time,

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since he asked me so pathetically; I can't help mothering him a bit—poor boy! His sorrow struck deep; it is terrible to be an only child. I'm glad you quelled the riot in the orchard, I thought Bedlam had broken loose."

"It had," said Helen, "and poor Will is a pauper in consequence, but it serves him right. Then we may go in the morning? Thank you, Mummie, you're a perfect dear," and Helen embraced her mother so fervently that Mrs. Ormesby smiled and wondered why.

The next morning was cool and promising. The four conspirators met as quietly and as secretly as they could, and just as the colors of the new day began to tint the sky they were mounted and off, Helen and Philip leading the way, for the blacks were beautiful, fleet animals, with racing blood in their veins, keen and quick to answer the touch of whip or rein.

Fred vaulted into the light saddle, which was all that Danny would submit to. The sagacious little beast looked round, sensitive to the difference in weight on top of him, for Fred was much heavier than John. This provoked him and he shook his head angrily once or twice, but Ruth patted him and talked to him as she brought Brownie alongside.

She would not have owned it to any one, but she was just a bit nervous, for Fred, though an excellent rider, knew little of the prairie horses and their ways. She said nothing to the others, but she had her neatly coiled lariat safe and ready for use, and her watchful eye was scarcely away for a moment from Danny and his rider.

Fred was in high spirits; permission to ride Danny had been a hard-wrung victory, and there was much to talk over besides, for Ruth took a keen interest in his work. His College career had closed with a pleasant surprise, he had won a much-coveted scholarship, and

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a leading city newspaper was willing to start him along the path of journalism, his chosen profession.

"So you see, I can put theory into practice as I trudge from Columbia down to my office job, and I won't have to leave the kids, either," he said, in the occasional moments when Danny allowed him to get close enough for speech.

"It's all too good to be true," said Ruth. "I only wish I could be here to see you as a 'cub reporter'—isn't that what they call beginners?"

"By Jove! You *won't* be here—that's so. Then whom, in thunder, can I confide in! I wish you hadn't made yourself so agreeable—such a good comrade—so—indispensable—in fact, if you were going to take yourself out of sight, the very moment you've proved that you are useful beyond measure."

Ruth gave an uncertain little laugh. "Pray tell me, how did I know this time last year that there was any such person in existence as Frederick Marston Gayle, until Kitty introduced us—do you remember?"

"As if I could forget how you came tumbling through that gap in the hedge—and I wheeled around and almost stepped on your glasses. I always look on that moment as the turning-point in my life."

"Of course it was!" said Ruth, sniffing an under-current of sentiment, and backing away from it like one of her own broncos. "The Chief gave you a job and took you under her august protection. Lucky boy! You'll always be lucky, Fred; you have what we novelists call temperament of the right sort; in other words, you are temperamentally and psychologically cut out for success."

"Look here!" He gave a short pull to his rein that wheeled Danny round, much to that gentleman's dis-

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gust. "If you put a word about psychology or temperament in your novel, it shall be burned in the public square. Write about people and things; that's all there is in the world, anyway, in spite of the dictionary. Good-by!" for while emphasizing his remarks Fred had slackened his rein, and Danny, feeling the freedom, had given a snort, had tossed his black mane, had laid his ears close to his head, and bolted!

Ruth gasped—her heart stood still—it was all so sudden—and for the moment even she had lost her vigilance. She could feel Brownie quiver beneath her; she leaned forward and loosened the lariat from her saddle, then she, too, gave her pony his head. If only Fred would have presence of mind to get a grip of his reins again he would be safe; if not—the color left her face, but her nerve was splendid. She set her lips in a straight line and sped on, her breath coming short and quick. Her hope was in the two blacks ahead—trained horses with good riders; they might halt the runaway, if they turned in time. Always "if." The word hammered itself into her throbbing brain. She bent low in the saddle and used her spurs; now she could see the black speck in the distance. The others had *not* turned—a little nearer she came, and a low thankful cry escaped her; she could see the tall figure sitting as straight and immovable as if glued to the saddle, pulling on the reins with a strength against which the maddened horse fought vainly. The deadly fear of a moment before fell from Ruth like a load, Fred was fighting like a cowboy—and he would win.

She stood up in her stirrups and her shrill "Halloo!" cut the still air. From far away an answering signal came to her. The others would turn now; she was soon

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close enough to shout to Fred: "Lean just a little to one side and hold on, I'm going to catch Danny!"

The next moment the lariat whizzed through the air, and Danny was brought to a standstill so suddenly that, without Ruth's warning, his rider would have been pitched, head foremost, out of the saddle. For a few seconds neither could speak; both were breathing heavily, and the two spent ponies joined in the chorus. Then Fred took off his cap and wiped his streaming face.

"How much do you—charge for that ride?" he panted.

"You—can—have it for nothing—you've earned it," Ruth panted in reply.

"By Jove! there was one time when I thought the kids were going to be orphans again; that made me mad. I hadn't planned to die that way, and so I sawed the little brute's mouth with all the strength I had."

"The very thing!" cried Ruth. "It saved your life and made Danny know his master; no cowboy could have done better."

"You flatter me!" Fred bowed, with his hand on his heart. "I think I'll slip off a bit, and see what's become of my legs. I held on so tight that I don't know if I really have any knee-joints left, or if I'm only tied together with pieces of elastic."

"Poor little Danny! he looks like a whipped dog. And see his frothy flanks; he was bad and he knows it—which is more than can be said of many people. Here, give him a lump of sugar, I always carry some, and rub his nose, then he'll feel that he's forgiven."

"Has he feelings?" asked Fred, dubiously, while he obeyed orders.

"Yes, and you quite lacerated them by threatening

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to burn my novel in the public square. Remember that. Here come the others—too late for the fun!”

“Well, what in the world is the matter?” exclaimed Helen, glancing from one disheveled figure to the other, and of course the whole story had to be recounted, while they all rested under the shade of a spreading tree, and the brilliant morning sun came up from the east.

They rode back in the dewy freshness of the day, and were about to slip into the house—after quietly leaving their horses in the stables—when the sound of Josephine’s violin broke the stillness. She played “Hail, the Conquering Hero Comes,” and there was a flutter of summer gowns to the veranda. The twins ran down the steps with a wreath of glossy green. Alice removed Fred’s cap, and Elsie set the wreath upon his head, while Sylvia and Edith came forward with libations of foaming milk.

“Our first milking!” they announced proudly.

“We heard all about the race,” cried Sylvia. “Jimmy Doyle, whose watchful eye never slumbers, saw it from the top of a gate-post. Hurrah for you, Fred!”

“I wish you could have seen it, Miss Henrietta,” said Ruth, as they mounted the steps. “Buffalo Bill couldn’t have given you a bigger show,” and she laughed at the old lady’s consternation, as she followed the others indoors, to change her dress for breakfast.

CHAPTER XVI

LONDON, AUGUST FIRST.

MY DEAREST GIRL:

It was suddenly borne to my mind that while I have been the recipient of many highly interesting letters from "Miss Ormesby, of the Farm"—as I hear you are called—I have contented myself with acknowledging them most gratefully, in letters to your mother; but when the "round robin" from the "Seven" reached me last week, and I found in it—besides a remarkable and concise bulletin of Farm affairs—such breezy, well-sketched portraits of each one of you, I could not help feeling very contrite.

Now, your mother hasn't put me up to this; she doesn't even know I'm writing to you, nor will she, until she opens the mail-bag and finds a letter to Miss Helen Ormesby, instead of her usual weekly budget. She *might* find, tucked away in the corner of the aforesaid bag, a tiny little note to herself—which is not to be read aloud, for it is a love-letter. I still write them, Helen, after all these years, and the things I say in them are quite incompatible with my white hair, and my otherwise serious exterior, for the other party to the contract—to put it legally—has cheated time, and cultivates, not only in herself but in me, a taste for the sugar-plums of youth.

Had I known, when I waved good-by to the little group on the pier that windy March day, that whole seasons would come and go before we met again, I don't think I could have done it. Many a time during the long and tedious process of adjusting things and handling the little complications that arose in delicate business matters, which even the "Seven" could scarcely under-

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stand, I have longed to cut and run, and spend whole happy days at the Farm, for I know how lovely it is at this season, and your mother writes such glowing accounts of the way you girls are managing things, that I can scarcely believe my senses. And to think that *my* girl is responsible for these wonders, that *her* head has planned the whole economical scheme for the year, makes me prouder than I can say, and this—without disparaging her able fellow-workers, whose aid was indispensable; but I am sure they will all feel with me that their Chief has been an inspiration.

Now I will talk a little—a very little—of my own affairs. When you came home, my dear, fresh from College and full of hope, it was all I could do to meet you half-way in your joyous plans; great rocks were looming ahead of me, even your mother could not half appreciate the danger, because she never knew. Her generous help tided me over, your sunny presence calmed my nervous fears. Your highly amusing though clever financial arrangements, your firm grasp of the situation—regardless of the nettles—showed me the indomitable spirit of the Ormesbys.

I own I was a little afraid of the outcome. I had a wholesome fear, too, of what Hugh might think—we parents as we grow older are more or less slaves to the opinions of our children—but I found the dear fellow only chagrined that he had no share in your glory, and I am truly rejoiced to hear that he has been able to lend his timely aid just when you needed it.

So you see, little girl, the example of my children—indeed, of the illustrious “Seven”—has spurred me on. I think I may safely say we are out of the woods, the long and miserable tension is over, and many more than myself will have cause to rejoice. Before many weeks I will expect a deputation at the pier to welcome me home; but remember, I must see the Farm in all its glory of harvest-time, so do not open the town house to receive me. That will be “another story,” as Kipling says.

I won't call down paternal blessings on your head—I'm a very modern father—and the old way sounds

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story-bookish. I don't even bless the day that gave you birth, I'm just glad you're here. I don't sign myself "Your honored father," but just

DADDY.

Helen looked up from her letter with shining eyes and smiled across at her mother. "It's all right and quite beautiful, Mummie dear, so you'll get your sweetheart home before another moon. Here, read it to the girls—I can't—it's really too—too 'Daddyish,'" and Helen laughed in a shy, choked way as she made her escape.

Praise from those she loved was very sweet to her, but this brought its little twinge of heartache, for she realized, more fully than at first, what a sacrifice her father had made in leaving home, and what his absence had meant to her mother, who had borne it so patiently and cheerfully.

"It's all very well for Daddy to flaunt my prowess and stroke my feathers," she said, when the "Seven" were discussing the interesting and exciting contents of the letter, "but it's the quiet heroism that counts most. I doubt if the ancient ladies of Ormesby ever sent their husbands to the wars with the spirit Mummie has shown."

"Three cheers for Mrs. Ormesby!" suggested Sylvia, from the depth of the hammock. The "Seven" were gathered in a corner of the veranda, and the girls gave them with a will, ending with the quaint old College yell, that echoed over the hills and brought a smile to Philip's face as he joined the group.

"I was wondering if any of you would go for a row," he asked. "There's promise of a gorgeous sunset; it would be a pity to miss it."

"Your invitation is so general that we don't quite

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know which one of us you want," said Edith, with her most innocent air.

"Then all come; the three boats are in, and the canoe's there, too; perhaps your mother and Rita will join our sunset party," he looked at Helen. "Fred and Hugh have used me as a Mercury; they've had a dip and are dressing, so I came ahead."

"Mother will go, I'm sure," said Helen, "but Rita is taking early tea at Lizzie's with the kiddies. I would suggest Aunt Henrietta as a substitute, but her rheumatism would spoil the effect and eclipse the sunset. I'll go for Mummie."

It was a merry party that wound its way down the rocky path to the river's edge. The twins had taken possession of Mrs. Ormesby, who seemed to be a perfect passion with them, and during the walk they used what Sylvia declared was undue influence, and secured her as their companion on the river. Hugh took Josephine and Edith; Fred, Ruth and Sylvia, and whether accidentally or intentionally, only the canoe was left, rocking gently at the little landing.

Philip thought merely of the good luck, as he held it steady for his companion to take her place, but Helen knew her mates, though she said nothing, as Philip sat happily opposite, sweeping the water lazily with his paddle.

The three boats had spread out side by side, and were pulling slowly into the glory of the sunset. The two in the canoe let themselves drift with the tide, for the river was so still and so transparent that every tint of the gorgeous sky was reflected in its depths; there were banks of gold shading into a deep rose, patches of the blue sky faded to a pale turquoise peeped here and

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there, while far in the west the vanishing sun left its blood-red trail. It was very impressive, very awe-inspiring, to watch those colors, which even the greatest painters have failed to reproduce, and a deep stillness—which heralded the coming of night—brooded over all, for only low murmurs came from the boats ahead, and the two in the canoe were silent.

Helen leaned back among the cushions, her eyes fixed on the mass of ever-changing clouds, while Philip was content to watch her, respecting her mood and indulging himself in alluring dreams of the future, which set his pulses throbbing. When the colors began to fade, and the violet hues of the evening enveloped them, Helen came back to earth with a little sigh:

“I often wonder if the people who do not believe in God ever saw a sunset,” she said.

“They certainly never saw a sunrise,” answered Philip. “They are a set of very material earthlings, and are of no account in the world.”

“It’s all so solemn, so prophetic,” said the girl dreamily. “It’s good to pause during the busy day, like this, and think—but there! how stupid I am, and you have been working *so* hard,” she laughingly pointed to his trailing paddle; he laughed, too, and the spell was broken. They could hear ripples of laughter from the boats ahead, and the girlish voices occasionally blended with Fred’s or Hugh’s deeper tones.

“Can you keep a secret?” asked Helen.

“Try me.”

“You look trustable; Mummie knows, and I know, that’s all.”

“Then *I* must!” decidedly; “a triangle is never perfect without the third side.”

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"Edith is to have a birthday on Thursday, and it's to be a day of surprises from beginning to end—perhaps some echo of it has reached you."

He laughed. "There are five other girls besides yourself, and not all so discreet. Mr. Carlyle and his sister are coming to dine for one thing, and they will spend the night; we are all doubling up to accommodate them, I understand."

"Quite right, and there's to be a surprise dance in the barn; lots of people are coming from the city and neighboring country places."

His face clouded. "I can't," he said, "not yet—you will excuse me, I know—but you understand."

"Indeed, I do," she cried warmly; "but the girls are fond of dancing, and so when they planned it all I just couldn't say 'no'; do you mind?" Her voice grew very gentle, and her eyes—full of unspoken sympathy—were raised to his.

"I don't think I mind anything when you look at me like that," he said slowly.

"And you won't be lonely?" ignoring his words.

"Oh, no; I'll stay on the deserted veranda and listen to the revelry, and once during the evening, a fairy princess will flit my way and sit out a dance with me, and then I'll go to bed and dream till morning—is it a bargain?"

"Y-yes, I think so," said Helen doubtfully, "that is—if I can—I'm hostess, you know."

"As such, you must take care of *all* your guests, remember."

"But that is not *the* secret," said Helen; "bend low and listen. Miss Burne-Elliott is going to motor out here and spend the week end with us, and not a soul knows. I'm giving her my room, and turning in with

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Mother. Won't it be fun to have her here—and can't you imagine the girls' faces when they see her? Now turn and paddle back, the others have far outstripped us, and we'll just have time to dress for dinner."

"'You're to be Queen of the Day, Edith,
You're to be Queen of the Day'!"

cried Helen, on the eventful Thursday, calmly paraphrasing the great poet, as she and the others, in the early morning, invaded the room she shared with Sylvia.

Edith opened her blue eyes with the rapt look of the just-awakened sleeper, and sat up in bed, her blonde hair falling in picturesque ringlets over her neck and shoulders, to receive meekly the boisterous congratulations which opened the festivities.

"This is the day you are to do nothing for yourself," announced Ruth. "First of all, we are to be your tirewomen. Sylvia, you know where she keeps her things, play maid and lay them out. Elsie, prepare her bath—put perfume in it. Alice, escort her to the door. Josephine, throw that pretty dressing-gown over her, and thrust those little feet into those dainty slippers I see peeping from under the bed. Now, then, Miss Carlyle, ten minutes' strict attention to duty will do the job, and make you clean and fair as the morning."

There was much jesting and laughing as the girls flew about on their self-imposed tasks. Sylvia laid out a dainty white linen sailor suit, with a broad collar of pale blue. Helen rummaged in her drawer of pretty lingerie for the required articles to complete her toilet. Alice brought out white shoes, with stockings to match. Elsie hovered round the toilet table, arranging brushes and combs and sorting hairpins for Josephine, who was always general hairdresser on state occasions, so by the

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time Edith emerged—all pink and white from her cold plunge—she was seized upon and so deftly handled that she yielded with helpless laughter, while the girls passed her from one to another, in the various stages of dressing.

Then she was borne downstairs, to be received with a volley of joyous greetings from the assembled family, which gathered round a table loaded with roses, and all sorts of pretty home-made gifts were showered upon her. Kitty and Will came over early, to act as her special messengers during the day, and the three young men laid offerings of candy and fruit before her, and she basked all day in the light of their society, for she was allowed to go nowhere unattended by a swain. Even Ann came up personally to inquire her wishes for luncheon and dinner, and if she spoke, the entire household hushed itself to listen. Miss Henrietta's gift had been a crazy-looking blue shawl of her own knitting, and Ruth sat in a shady corner of the veranda, busy on a wreath of silk rosebuds, which the "Queen of the Day" was to wear among her golden tresses that evening.

Helen issued orders for a general holiday, and beyond the necessary out-door work, which could not be put off, the workers obeyed.

"For honest hens will lay,
No matter what the day,"

sang Ruth.

"And the day's supply of milk and cream must be attended to," declared Sylvia.

Edith's was the only summer birthday; the others had been celebrated quietly at home, with little jubilees among the "Seven," but the girls were eager for a frolic.

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The whole smiling country looked beautiful *en fête*, and preparations for the dance in the barn went on secretly all day, right under Edith's unconscious nose. She knew her father and aunt were expected to dinner, and when Helen announced that the function would be a full-dress affair, she merely smiled and submitted, allowing the girls to robe her in her prettiest. They all chose white for this special evening, and very cool and charming they looked when they streamed out on the veranda, to welcome the guests whom Jerry drove from the station.

Edith's father was a handsome, soldierly looking man. The girls had always pictured him sedate and severely middle-aged, but in spite of his nineteen-year-old daughter, he looked anything but that; at most, he could not have been much past the gateway of the forties, and his lithe slim figure and bright blue eyes gave him the appearance of a much younger man. His sister, Mrs. Garland, was evidently younger still, and wore her widow's black lightly and becomingly. She was devoted to Edith, and rejoiced inwardly that the year's probation was nearly at an end, and that next winter she could "bring out" her beautiful niece in the proper and approved fashion.

The two guests added much to the family party, for Mr. Carlyle was a brilliant talker and had traveled over the world, and both he and his sister took such unfeigned interest in the Farm and its development that they became favorites at once, and the "Seven," supplemented by Mrs. Ormesby and the three young men, with Rita and Miss Henrietta in the background, and the youngsters hovering on the brink of the lively conversation—were fascinated and entertained.

Helen alone seemed absent-minded, and her atten-

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tion wandered once in awhile; she glanced anxiously from time to time at her watch, then finally she heard the welcome rumble of a motor car coming nearer and nearer; it soon roused the attention of the others.

"Why, how funny!" exclaimed Ruth, whose trained ear always caught the slightest shade of sound. "That car is not passing us by in the high road—I do believe it has turned in at the Lodge gates. Yes, there it is, rounding the curve leading up to the avenue. Who on earth—why, girls—girls—it's Miss Burne-Elliot, and she's waving to us!"

Gathering up her fleecy skirts, Ruth fled down the steps, followed by the others, their ribbons and laces fluttering as they ran. The motor gave a final spurt and turned in at the *porte-cochère*, while many hands stretched out to help the girlish figure to alight.

"I was so afraid you wouldn't get here on time," said Helen, with a sigh of relief. "I couldn't have kept the secret much longer."

"The secret!" cried the others in chorus. "You knew?"

Helen nodded, laughing, while Miss Burne-Elliot chimed in with her beautiful voice.

"It has been a thoroughly hatched plan and carefully arranged. Now, if I can unfurl this wrap and take off my hood, I wouldn't look so like old Mother Bunch. Don't bother about my chauffeur," she added, as Helen made a motion to her brother, "the car goes back to town and will return for me on Monday."

"Then come right to your room," said Helen; "you have plenty of time to change for dinner."

"I don't have to change," said Miss Burne-Elliot laughing. "I was fearful of being late, so I prepared for emergencies—see!"

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She slipped off her silk motor coat and the girls beheld a vision, in a pale pink gown. She untied her hood, and her dark uncrowned head emerged in all its graceful proportions. "But I will go to my room, if I may," she added, turning confidentially to the others; "I must put a dab of powder on my nose, a function I never perform in public—necessary as it is. Come up with me, girls, I can't lose you for a moment."

"I think I'll send an article to the paper, telling the world how Miss Burne-Elliot puts powder on her nose," said Ruth, who stood by watching the operation.

"Take notes about me while I'm here, and jot down my peculiarities, I give you leave," said Miss Burne-Elliot merrily.

"Really?" asked Ruth, "I may take you at your word."

"Do, I am in earnest. If I can launch you on your literary career I will be more than repaid. Whose birthday am I supposed to celebrate?" she added, turning to Helen. "You didn't say in your letter, so I brought a gift that would be appropriate for any."

She rummaged in her satchel as she spoke, and fished out a small jeweler's box, while the girls pushed Edith to the front, laughing and blushing like a pink rose. Miss Burne-Elliot caught the lovely face in her two hands, and kissed it French-fashion, on both cheeks.

"Remember, girls, I was dispassionate in my choice. I didn't know who would receive this, but I flattered myself that to any or to all it would be acceptable."

Edith's excited fingers were busy with the string; inside the box was a smaller one of white velvet. This opened with a spring, disclosing a dainty dull gold locket on a slender chain; the eager fingers opened the tiny clasp and Edith gave a little cry of rapture and delight,

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for a radiant *Juliet* smiled back at her, no less radiant indeed, than the smiling woman who stood by, watching the pretty picture, for the girls crowded about the lucky recipient, with not a single shadow on their bright young faces, as sincerely delighted over the gift as was Edith herself. Helen lifted it out of its box and clasped it round the white throat, till then devoid of any ornament. Miss Burne-Elliot clapped her hands.

"Bravo! I like your spirit; no wonder the 'Seven' succeed in what they undertake. If there was more of that in my profession there would be greater names among us. But wait," she added, "fearing there might be feeling, I came armed," and she drew from the satchel, half-a-dozen boxes, the counterparts of Edith's.

To describe the scene would be almost impossible. There was such a clamor of excited voices that Miss Burne-Elliot put her hands over her ears, and then found herself caught in a tempestuous sea of embraces, from which she emerged laughing and crying for mercy, while Mrs. Ormesby appeared at the door to ask what was the matter.

"I should have welcomed you more properly, Miss Burne-Elliot," she said in her cordial way, "but these madcap girls of mine deserted our guests, and I was helplessly tied. Curiosity got the better of us all, so I came up to see." Then she was called upon, not only to admire, but to clasp the little chains, and they all floated down, just as dinner was announced.

Mary had done her artistic best to make the table beautiful. Ann had served up food for the gods, and the bubbling spirits of the company overflowed in bright speeches that kept every one in a perfect ripple of laughter, and when dinner was over, they sipped their coffee on the veranda, watching the stars come out, and

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all but Edith, straining their ears to get the first sound of music from the barn.

Fred and Hugh slipped away to light the lanterns which strung the place, and give the signal to the musicians, and as the chimes of the grandfather's clock in the hall rang out nine, the music clashed upon the air. Edith started, and looked about her at the laughing, expectant faces, then suddenly it dawned upon her—

"A dance," she breathed, "and in the barn—look how it's lighted!" for Fred and Hugh had rolled back the doors, and the brilliant illumination streamed out.

Motor cars came speeding up the road, and in through the *porte-cochère*; carriages rumbled to the step, all depositing their loads of laughing, merry guests. Edith was escorted in state to the barn, and soon the fun began, and the big veranda was deserted, save for the solitary figure in one corner, visible only in the darkness, by the light of a cigar. Helen paused for one moment in the doorway.

"Are you sure you don't mind?" she said, apparently to the darkness.

"Come out and see."

She came, guided by his voice.

"Good night," she said, holding out her hand.

Philip laid down his cigar and caught it in both of his.

"Good night, little friend, it will not be for long, you know, you promised."

"Did I?" innocently.

"I was under that impression—what time may I expect you?"

"Like Cinderella—at twelve of the clock—I'll get Jerry to bring me across. Only one dance, remember," and she flitted away before he could argue the point.

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The band was good, and the dreamy music filled the air. Philip Trent had much to think of as he sat alone, they were not unpleasant thoughts, though many of them were sad, for they hovered around the memory of his mother, whom he had loved with an uncommon devotion. Once his solitude was broken, for Rita came to say good night.

"It was a lovely sight, Philip, I wish you could have seen it, such a riot of light and color—such pretty girls—lots of them came from the city you know; they can't eclipse *our* girls though."

"I should say not," with emphasis, "why didn't you stay longer, Rita?"

"The children went, and I grew tired, the lights hurt my eyes, and I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind company for a few minutes."

"You dear little tired thing! so you thought of me in the midst of the gayety," he took her crutches gently from her, and carried her to a comfortable armchair, fixing the cushions behind her in his kind "big-brotherly" fashion. "You might as well rest here and tell me all about it."

"Is there any one you wish particularly to hear about?" asked Rita, studying his face from her dark corner. "Edith, I suppose?"

"You know better, you bad child, but there's no use hiding things from your sharp eyes. I try not to wear my heart upon my sleeve."

"It's embroidered in such a deep red, that one cannot help seeing it, even on a black coat sleeve," said Rita soberly.

"Then I must rip out the stitches."

"You'd leave a scar; it would show."

"I'll try and hide it then, for no one must know, and

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you must forget it, little sister—for awhile. I am poor, and I have my way to make, I must not dream.”

“But dreams are pleasant,” said Rita softly. “Maybe she has dreams too; she looks like it sometimes—since you came.”

“Do you mean that—she cares?”

“I don’t know. I watch people closely you see, because I’m quiet and don’t talk much, and I can’t help seeing things.”

“What things?”

“Intangible fancies—I daresay. Philip, give me my crutches, I must go to bed.”

“But you said you’d stay.”

“I’ve changed my mind,” she declared laughing. “You are too talkative, besides it’s nearly twelve and—I was to give you a message.”

“Well?”

“Cinderella says she will be on time—now will you let me go?”

He gravely brought her the crutches and helped her out of the chair, walking beside her to the foot of the stairs.

“Wait—I’ll take you up,” he said, and Rita sighed in the fulness of content as his strong arms carried her like a featherweight.

“Good night, big brother,” she said, when he had set her gently on the ground and handed her the crutches.

“Good night, little sister,” he answered, and then he went down on the veranda again, to sit and watch till Helen came.

“Just a minute!” she exclaimed, as she ran lightly up the steps. “Jerry is waiting down by the shrubbery to take me back.”

“Miss Ormesby, you promised me a dance, that lasts

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more than a minute; five is the minimum—usually ten—and if you ‘sit out,’ fifteen! I’ve even known persons who skipped a dance when they ‘sat out.’ ”

“Horrible!” exclaimed Helen, settling herself comfortably in the big chair, “those persons had no consciences—I am different.”

“It was good of you to come at all,” he said, with unexpected humbleness that disarmed her.

“I wanted to come,” she answered. “Mummie has been worrying about you all the evening; she thought it was shocking for us to leave you alone.”

“She is a darling!” cried Philip fervently, “tell her so, when you go back, with my love.”

“I’ll not be Cupid’s messenger,” laughed Helen, “and such flattery is bad, even for the best of mothers. What have you been thinking of to-night, ‘alone and unobserved?’ ”

It was a leading question and it had slipped out unawares; she was sorry when it had passed her lips, for he answered at once, in his direct way:

“Of you, naturally.”

Helen flushed in the darkness; there was a moment’s silence, then:

“I wish you wouldn’t.”

“Wouldn’t what? Think of you! It can’t be helped, ask me something easier.”

“I mean—I mean—” floundering helplessly.

He leaned across and took her hand, which lay on the arm of the chair nearest him.

“You are right. It is very daring, and I should not, now; I will be very careful until I go away.”

She raised startled eyes to his, after one or two ineffectual attempts to release her hand, “Not yet, I hope,” she murmured.

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"Within a few weeks. My holiday has been all too long for a man who has to carve his own career. I must see several business friends of my father's, who may put me in the way of what I want. This break in my life has been sweet and restful—but I dare not—I cannot in honor stay longer; do you understand—can you appreciate the temptation it is to be here? I must go out into the world and conquer, as I told you, and then—then—it may be years, but I can wait. Look at me, Helen—don't take your hand away—answer me fairly. Would it be worth my while to work—and wait?"

"I—can't—tell—" she faltered. "Life is so new and strange."

"I know," he said eagerly, "you have much to see and learn, and you will have your choice among better men, perhaps, but may I wait, and work meanwhile?"

She rose a little unsteadily, and he stood beside her, tall and grave and earnest.

"I must go," she said, with a faint, tremulous smile. "They will wonder what is keeping me, and the time is up," for the insistent hall clock had struck the quarter.

"You haven't answered my question yet," he insisted.

"Must I?"

"Nor looked at me."

She raised her shy brown eyes to his for a fleeting moment, the next she laughed softly. "My hand is still in your possession. I would like it please. I *must* go."

He bent his head and kissed it.

"Take it then," he said, "with my mark upon it. Good night, Helen Ormesby."

"Good night, Philip Trent," she answered, and then eluding his grasp, she ran down the steps and melted away into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVII

THERE is truly no more exciting moment than the coming into port of a great ocean liner, and on the fair September morning when Mr. Ormesby was expected, there seemed, to those most interested, an unusual flutter on the pier, for the "Seven" were there in full force, headed by Hugh and Mrs. Ormesby, while at a short distance from the pier, two little tugs were snorting and steaming, for the vessel had been sighted, and they were to tow her to her dock.

The moment of arrival beggared description. There stood Mr. Ormesby on deck, waving his hat like a boy, and Mrs. Ormesby on the pier, regardless of interested bystanders, stretched out her arms as if they were quite long enough to span the churning, restless water between them.

Down the gangway came the passengers, and before Mr. Ormesby's feet had fairly touched American soil, he was almost swept away by the avalanche that fell upon him, and the people who passed smiled in sympathy, wondering if he was the father of an unusually large family, or the principal of a young ladies seminary. There was rather a long wait, as Mr. Ormesby's name was far down on the list of the Customs officers, but finally he was free, his trunks put in the hands of the Express Company, and himself hurried to the open Victoria, which Jerry had in waiting.

"The bride and groom will drive out," said Hugh,

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"we, girls, will take the train," and they all trooped happily away, leaving the two to enjoy, to their fill, these first sweet moments of reunion.

"Well, Jerry," said Mr. Ormesby, as he put his wife in the carriage and shook hands with the old coachman, "I hear it's been a busy period at the Farm."

"You're right, sir, we've kep' a-movin'," answered Jerry, touching his hat. "There ain't a square foot of the place, sir, Miss Helen hasn't made use of. It's her has the head for pullin' things through. Wait till you see the Ormesby Guard," and Jerry's eyes twinkled as he gathered up the reins.

Their way lay through the pleasant harvest country, and the smell of new-mown hay was in the air. Mr. Ormesby gave a sigh of content as he leaned back in the comfortable seat beside his wife, and drank in the beauty of the landscape.

"How I have longed for this!" he said. "Through every busy moment, Marian, the thought of home has haunted me, and now that I'm here, that endless stretch of months seems just a horrible nightmare."

"To me it was a horrible reality," said Mrs. Ormesby, with a tremulous little laugh. "If it hadn't been for the hum of activity always about me, and the ever-bubbling spirits of the 'Seven,' I don't believe I could have stood it, Will. You cannot imagine what they have accomplished—why they've run the Farm! There hasn't been an expense incurred that they haven't been able to meet; it has been marvelous. And through Helen's systematic management of things, you wouldn't guess the amount of work that goes on. I don't know what we shall do next year—we can't let things go back, after all Helen's labor in pushing them ahead, and when the 'Seven' are ready to disband—Oh—I hate to think of it!"

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"My dear, we won't let things go back; we can employ skilled labor to keep up the work, and Helen *might* honor us occasionally with her sage advice. You know we still have *our* girl, even when the others go home."

"Yes—" said Mrs. Ormesby dubiously, "but she's growing up so fast—and—she's very attractive, you know."

"Marian," said her husband sharply, "are there thieves around?"

"I'm afraid so—one."

"You needn't tell me who it is—I know."

"And the worst of it is, I like him," sighed Mrs. Ormesby.

"Oh, you soft women, with your big sympathies! Watch me send him about his business. I'll say 'hands off our girl, she's ours for a long while to come.'"

"But he's so manly, Will, and he's willing to wait."

"So it's come to that—he's spoken to Mamma?"

"Only a few quiet words, and but a hint or two to Helen; the child told me; but she's shy about her own thoughts, and I don't press her."

"Oh, I see!" said Mr. Ormesby, "the mischief's done."

Mrs. Ormesby nestled a little closer to her husband, and stole her hand into his.

"Marriage isn't such a very bad thing after all," she said.

"Ours is an exceptional case."

"You reminded me once when the Experiment began, that I was not as old as Helen when I tried a still bigger experiment."

"Look here, Marian, what is back of all this—are you sent ahead as an emissary, and are we to have an impromptu wedding when I get home?"

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"Heaven forbid!" cried Mrs. Ormesby laughing. "Philip Trent has his way to win before he could think of such a thing. He has turned his back upon the College and is going into active business life; all he needs is a start, and he's bound to succeed, for he has the right kind of ambition."

A smile crept round the corners of Mr. Ormesby's mouth.

"And what a champion! Well, 'forwarned is forearmed,' to use a trite phrase."

"Oh, Will dear, do be kind, he's—he's staying at the Farm."

"The Dickens he is! Though, of course, you wrote me, I remember."

"He was so lonely you know." There was tender pathos in her voice.

"You dear woman! Well, I'll do what I can to repair the mischief, but I must see for myself how the land lies. Hello! what's this?" for they were approaching the Lodge gates, and lined up on either side stood half a dozen of the Ormesby Guard, straight as ramrods. As they saw the carriage they set up a shrill "Rah, rah, rah!" and saluted military fashion. It was truly an imposing sight, and Jerry turned around to whisper impressively, with an uncontrollable wink of his eye.

"Them's the gardeens of the fruit trees, Mr. Ormesby. We never have stealin' these days."

"Yes, I know, I heard," and diving in his pockets, Mr. Ormesby drew forth a handful of coins, which he scattered among the boys as the carriage swept through the gates.

What a welcome home that was! All the day was marked by festivity, and before the shadows fell, Mr. Ormesby had visited the various seats of industry, and

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had heard with unfeigned admiration, the history of the six months' trial, told as only the "Seven" could tell it, interlarded with bits of humor that at times convulsed him, yet through it all he detected that fine and generous spirit which had made of the "Seven" such a compact unit, and when he fell to praising them, it was Ruth who stopped him in her downright way, waving her hand in Helen's direction.

"It's the Chief you have to thank, Mr. Ormesby; the way hasn't been easy, and many of us have balked at our jobs. There have been days, for instance, when I could have wished the entire poultry-yard at the bottom of the sea, but there was always Helen's daily visit to look forward to, and a bit of cheerful gossip, with perhaps some jolly plan for the afternoon and evening; she was always sure to leave a ray of sunshine behind her. She is a rare combination, let me tell you. I think I shall put her into the greatest novel of the century." And there was a titter among the group of girls clustered around Mr. Ormesby, for Ruth's novel had become a matter of history.

Mrs. Ormesby had watched a little anxiously the greeting between her husband and Philip Trent, but when she saw the cordial smile upon the older man's face, and the grave, steadfast look of the younger one, as he held out his hand, she felt somewhat reassured. After dinner Fred and the children joined the party, and there was more lively talk and chatter, until Mrs. Ormesby came to the rescue.

"Enough, good people! Our traveler is done to death; he needs a night's rest. Go home, Fred. Come girls, not another word, or my wrath will descend upon you. There is another day coming and much to talk about."

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And so they separated for the night, but the "Seven" did not go to bed. They stealthily assembled in Helen's room, and waited for the house to grow quite still. Then, headed by Josephine, her violin tucked under her arm, they tiptoed down the stairs, grouped themselves quietly around Mr. Ormesby's door, and the sweet, plaintive strain of "Home, Sweet Home" floated out upon the quiet air, while the girlish voices, hushed to midnight gentleness, took up the refrain.

Mr. and Mrs. Ormesby had just fallen asleep when the sound awoke them. Hastily throwing on dressing gowns and slippers, they opened their door as the last notes died away.

"No words could be sweeter, girls," said Mr. Ormesby, as he stood with his arm about his wife, in the shadowy doorway. "From my heart I thank you all for this dear welcome home." Stooping, he kissed each blooming cheek, and the "Seven" stole quietly to bed, well pleased with the result of their serenade.

The next day opened in a very exciting manner, for Mr. Ormesby's trunks had come, and the entire household assembled in Mrs. Ormesby's room, to be present at the unpacking, for no one had been forgotten, and Mr. Ormesby took a keen and boyish delight in bestowing the gifts, which were appropriate and beautiful.

All the servants had been remembered in the most substantial way, and Miss Henrietta's stern face relaxed as she smoothed the folds of a soft gray silk, and patted the black lace scarf which lay on top. Will nearly lost his head over a complete photographic outfit, and Kitty and Rita retired to a corner to compare workboxes, the like of which they had never seen before. The two young men received inlaid match-boxes of exquisite workmanship, and Hugh, a superb toilet set of ebony and silver,

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over which the girls hung in envious rapture. By this time the contents of one trunk were nearly exhausted, and Mrs. Ormesby and the "Seven" were still out in the cold.

"Now," said Mr. Ormesby, pushing forward another, and a larger trunk, "before I open this very interesting receptacle, I want to say a few words, and I think I had better address them to you, Helen. I was anxious to bring home something specially lovely to the 'We are Seven Club.' At first I thought of some gifts commemorative of all their good deeds and of this experimental year—perhaps a piece of jewelry; but after several letters had passed between your mother and myself, we decided on a different plan. I wrote personally to all the interested parents of these here assembled, inviting them to Helen's coming-out party, early in November, and telling them that the 'Seven' would not disband until that date. Then, the good lady, my wife, and I, put our heads together, and decided to give the seven débutantes their 'coming out' gowns. I could not, with my limited knowledge of seams and gathers, have undertaken such a job, had it not been for a charitable lady friend, living in Paris, and blessed with consummate taste. Your mother sent all measurements direct from Miss Pierce, and—there's the result—open up, Marian."

"To slow music," said Sylvia, "I can hardly breathe from excitement."

Then the trunk was opened, and all they could see were wads and rolls of tissue paper, stuffed in with all a Frenchwoman's care and skill, and then, one by one, out came the lovely, soft, white silky gowns, the costly simplicity of which only a woman could appreciate. There were no two alike, some were pure white, others were cream or ivory-tinted, and the only thing at all

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uniform about them, was the fall of rare lace from each low neck.

"That was *my* idea, girls," said Mrs. Ormesby, when they exclaimed in rapture over the lace. "I wanted you all to have something which would outlast even a *débutante's* gown."

"Mine has already become an heirloom," said Ruth, peering through her glasses at the wonderful hand-wrought design.

"There's another layer at the bottom, Mummie," said Helen, when the seven gowns had been given to their respective owners, and the excitement had somewhat subsided.

"Why, so there is!" cried Mrs. Ormesby. "I don't believe this trunk *has* a bottom," and she fished up a large and suspicious-looking bundle, with her own name upon it. She flushed like a girl, and sank into a convenient chair. "Will! you've done something dreadful, I know."

"Only your 'coming out' gown," he said laughing. "I sent secretly to Miss Pierce for the measurements."

And forth from its many wrappings came a marvelous lace robe, made over the palest violet silk.

"By the Lord Harry! but you had duty to pay, Dad," cried Hugh, aghast.

"Yes, I admit it, but no matter how heavy the duty, the pleasure of this moment far outweighs it," he added gallantly.

Then he looked smilingly across at the young men. "Suppose we leave these feminines to gloat in their own peculiar way, and adjourn to my study for a smoke."

But Hugh and Fred were on teamster duty for the rest of the morning, and only Philip Trent accepted the cordial invitation. This was just what Mr. Ormesby

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wanted, and when, an hour later, the younger man came out and went up three steps at a time to his room, there was a radiant look upon his face, which had not been there before.

"May I come in, Daddy?" Helen stood in the open doorway, smiling across the big table at her father.

"Of course you may—what have you come for?"

"To thank you for the beautiful, beautiful gown. Oh, Daddy, it was lovely of you to think of us all that way," and she perched herself in her favorite position on the arm of his chair, while a sudden shyness came over her, and she fell to nervously fingering the buttons of his coat.

"I wish you had been home longer," she said at last; "you feel so—so strange and new—that—that—it's a little hard to—to—get used to you—and I wanted to talk to you—about—something."

"If it concerns Philip Trent, I will hear nothing," said Mr. Ormesby in a firm voice, though his eyes, turned away from the wistful young face at his elbow, were full of mirth. "Now, see here, little girl," he said, facing her suddenly, "we may as well have it out. The man who presumes to covet the sunshine in our home, must have a sun-parlor in which to house it. I've had a talk with Philip Trent, and I believe he understands. He's going away—that's the only cure for it."

"Going away!" cried Helen.

Mr. Ormesby nodded. "Yes, he's secured a position, a very important post abroad, which may keep him a year at least, on the other side."

"Why, he never told me—" began Helen, then she suddenly turned rosy red and flung her arms around her father's neck. "It's you, Daddy; you've given him the opening, you blessed, blessed child; how amply you repay

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my careful bringing up!" and Helen, half-laughing, half-crying, hid her face upon his shoulder.

"I want to get rid of him, you see," said Mr. Ormesby, stroking the bronze hair, "and that's the best way out of the difficulty. I fancy he has business ability—possibly I am mistaken, but time will show. Meanwhile your mother and I intend to hold our treasure, and guard it like the famous Ormesby garnet. Do you hear, Miss?"

"Yes, sir," meekly.

"There is to be strict attention to the business of 'coming out' next winter, and having a good time, and making the house gay for your mother and me—is it a bargain?"

Helen got up and stood before him, looking down into his eyes, with her clear, frank gaze.

"And after?" she asked.

"Put this same question a year hence—and we'll see. Will that satisfy you?" He rose too, and laid his hands gently on her shoulders. "Stay Helen Ormesby just a while longer, little daughter; it's a rare, sweet name, and one that we love and admire."

"Luncheon is served," said Phyllis, at the door, and so they put away sober things and joined the others.

On the last day of September, the "Experiment," undertaken a year ago, was sat upon by competent judges and pronounced an unqualified success. On that eventful night Mr. and Mrs. Ormesby were summoned by the "Seven" to attend a business meeting in the attic. Wondering and amused, they obeyed. They were evidently the last arrivals, and when their eyes had become used to the tremulous rays cast by the swinging lamp which hung from the rafters, they saw that the limited space was fairly well filled.

At the old three-legged desk sat Helen, surrounded

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by her mates, with Rita and Miss Pierce in the background. An improvised "private box," fenced off with old portraits, contained the handful of interested outsiders; Philip Trent, Miss Henrietta, Mrs. Dennison, and by special request, Will and Kitty, who could not bear to be left out of anything. On trunks and old boxes, a little to one side, were ranged the six servants, under whom the girls had trained, their forces swelled by Lizzie, whose instructions in the dairy were not to be overlooked. Cross-legged on the floor beside them, sat Jimmy Doyle, whose services had certainly augmented the fruit crop, and Fred and Hugh, each leaning against a rough pillar, looked down from their superior height upon the characteristic, if motley gathering. Two time-worn chairs had been provided for the guests of honor, and Helen, as spokesman, rose impressively:

"The time has come," she said, "when the 'Seven' are about to yield, into the proper keeping, the keys of domestic government." She took from her desk two tremendous brass ones, each tied with a huge red bow. "These represent, respectively, the Farm domain and the big house in town, and we are returning them with gratitude, for they have unlocked for us the secrets of many things. Bluebeard's wife could not have been more ignorant of her husband's secrets, than we 'Seven,' of the mysteries which those keys guarded, and even now," with a little smile, "we are just waking to the consciousness of how little we really do know, after all. That we have succeeded in a small way, however, I trust even the most skeptical will admit," with a glance in Miss Henrietta's direction. "We have received the best instruction, and we would like to have the opinion of our teachers concerning our progress. Miss Reilly, will you please state your experience?"

The mystified look on the faces of her audience gave way to intense amusement as she sat down, and Ann's portly figure loomed up. Within the compass of her limited world, the conventional surname had been tucked out of sight for so long, that people had forgotten her claim to any.

"It's pretty nigh a year back," said Ann, "when we six was called into the library and asked to take hold and help along by teachin' the young ladies how we done things. If there's one thing I can't abide it's a greenhorn, an' grass wasn't anything like the color of these—every last one of 'em. My land! the things I had to put up with them first two months, you'd never believe—an' then come a time when I had my special likes, an' could pick out my favor-ites. There's three among 'em—I ain't mentionin' names—as the Lord has gifted, not even a husband could phase 'em, but that ain't takin' the credit away from them as wasn't born to cookin', so to speak. I ain't here to pick an' choose; there ain't one but has her good p'int—an' I'm proud to say every mother's child could turn her hand—at a pinch—to gittin' three meals a day without upsettin' of the whole house."

Jerry didn't wait to be called, he was on his feet next.

"Ann didn't tell you one thing," he said, with a chuckle. "She clean forgot to mention that after she'd gave her promise to help, in the library, that night, she stormed an' stamped in the kitchen, good Ann-fashion. All their backs was up, except mine, I was dead sure Miss Helen would pull through from the very beginnin', I never had no doubts of a Darcy yet," with a smile at his mistress, "'an' a Darcy *an'* a Ormesby," sez I, 'can't lose.' But I own up, I never did see sech a takin' hold. Nothin' stumped any one of 'em in my line, an' you only had to show things once, to have 'em do it better than

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you could do it yourself next time. I ain't the fine talker that Ann is," with his own irrepressible twinkle, "but I can tell you what I said that night when they all cackled together—even John jerrin' a bit: 'I've been servin' in the Darcy family twenty-five years, an' Miss Helen's goin' to carry this scheme through, I know her better than you do, an' I won't have her laughed at when I'm around,' that's what I said, an' they soon quit laughin', I tell you. I can't say much about my teachin', but their learnin'! Just look at the Farm—it never was in better trim—an' I'm put to it to know how to manage next year. Of course," with a grin, "I'll always have Jimmy here to help me."

"Right-o!" murmured Jimmy, twirling his white cap dexterously around on one finger.

Phyllis and Mary were very bashful, but Mary was at length induced to give her testimony for both.

"We're wishing it could all happen again next year," she said, with her charming Irish smile. "I'm sure what the young ladies don't know, don't count much. They never put themselves above doin' anything; there was no job however small an' mean, they wasn't up to—an' kind an' nice to us girls from the beginnin' to the end. I just hate to think of their breakin' up an' going away, an' there isn't one of us that wouldn't cut ourselves in little pieces to serve 'em."

"As for laundry work," said Bridget, "I've never had a dress or a shirt-waist of theirs to iron since they took hold, an' the sunshine they brought along was enough to bleach the clothes in the winter time. I didn't want to teach 'em how to wash the clothes at first, but they would learn from the bottom up, and with them here to do the work, I could give up my job to-morrow, an' you wouldn't miss me."

As for John, he would have remained mute, but Jerry called out: "Speech, speech, Johnny, if you've got a tongue," and John rose reluctantly.

"There ain't much I can say; the 'Seven,' as I hear Miss Helen callin' 'em, is good sports. They can take hold with both hands an' pull anything through. If they was to tell me they could get a bale of cotton through a keyhole, I'd believe 'em."

He sat down amid thunderous applause, for he certainly voiced the popular sentiment in his childlike faith.

Lizzie's pupils blushed modestly when her praises were bestowed, and then there was an impressive pause, when little Miss Pierce rose timidly from her corner:

"I'm no talker," she began, "but I'll show you something more eloquent than words." At her signal the Club arose in a body. "Every dress was made by its owner," she announced, and truly the array before the spectators was a credit to the teacher, for the pretty gowns were fashioned with taste and skill, suiting admirably the style of the wearer. "These are just a few among the many," went on Miss Pierce. "I cannot begin to tell you the enormous amount of practical work accomplished in this line among the 'Seven.' No more dependence upon dressmakers—no more blind waste of money—my trade has taught true values, if it has accomplished nothing else—all can see the result."

"As to millinery," said Rita, in her quaint way, "I can only offer statistics with which the Club has furnished me. Last year each member paid an average of one hundred dollars for her supply of hats; this year our millinery class has accomplished the same work at exactly half-price, besides providing more suitable and becoming headgear."

"I'm not in the corps of teachers," said Fred, "in-

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deed, I'm one of the workers, and a very humble one, but a word must be said for the financing of this whole economical scheme. One head has planned it, and all hearts beat as one, in carrying it through. There is where the strength of nations lies, and the noble 'Seven' have dug down to the root of the matter."

"Three cheers for the Chief!" cried Ruth, rising suddenly to her feet and sweeping everybody with her, and the enthusiasm rang to the very rafters.

"One word," cried Hugh. "I can't say much, for sailors are not eloquent, but we must not forget the origin of the great Experiment; the cause indeed has been happily removed, and the House of Ormesby stands more firmly than ever upon its historic foundation. My little sister may not have gone through Annapolis, but she's a Captain when it comes to commanding her crew and steering her craft into smooth waters."

"Rah-rah-rah!" shouted Jimmy Doyle, who felt that his voice must be raised somewhere. This provoked another demonstration, and Helen rose again when the noise had subsided; with the keys still in her hand, she walked gravely to her father and mother:

"You entrusted us with a big problem," she said, "you put the keys into our hands and I am returning them untarnished," and she handed one to each.

"Why, they are no longer brass," cried Mrs. Ormesby. "They have turned to gold!"

With the fall of the leaves, came a change in many things, and when October was putting on her gorgeous tints, there was an exodus to the City. The "Seven," grown wiser and nobler through the year's experience, turned half-sadly from the beauty and peacefulness of the Farm—truly now they had come to a parting of the ways. Hugh had preceded them to the City to join his

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ship, which was in harbor. Philip had also left them to complete his final arrangements before sailing for London, which was to be his headquarters for the ensuing year. The girls were eager to return to meet the relatives who had come to claim their own, and the moment the big Fifth Avenue mansion got out of its summer wrappings, all sober thoughts were brushed aside, in preparation for Helen's début.

It was one of the earliest affairs of the season, and the society columns of the papers were full of it. The great house was aglow with the wonder and beauty of it, and the seven white-robed débutantes were not soon forgotten.

Helen was radiant as she stood beside her mother, and Philip, watching her from the doorway, felt a great pang, for to-morrow he would sail, and a year or more would stretch between him and his desires. Yet, after all, there was much to be thankful for, and he rejoiced that little Rita had found such a fair home.

"She must be my little sister," said Helen. "I shall feel so lonely with the others gone, and Rita and I can have our memories together."

"Then I know you will sometimes speak of me," cried Philip joyfully, "for Rita is fond of her big brother."

Helen laughed softly, but only her brown eyes spoke for her. She was the most elusive person.

The last strains of music had died away; the gay throngs of guests had melted away; the much-talked-of evening had passed into history; but the seven white-robed figures lingered long after, in Helen's room—loth to part, for the morrow would see them scattered.

"It's been a wonderful year!" cried Sylvia.

"It's been a full year," added Ruth.

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"There may be many sweet and happy years of our lives, but none like this," said Edith softly.

"I wish we could live it over," cried the twins.

"Oh, I shall miss you!" and the tears stood in Helen's eyes.

Josephine could not speak, but she took up her violin, and in the hush of the new morning, she played softly to them, as she had never played before, and into each girl's heart, smarting with its first pang, fell the balm her music always brought.

(1)

THE END.

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